JINSA 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Closing Iran's Second Front:

A U.S. Strategy for the Houthi Threat



JINSA Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy | November 2026



Authors

LTG Karen Gibson, USA (ret.)
Former Deputy Director of National Intelligence for National Security Partnerships; JINSA Generals & Admiral Program Participant

LtGen Sam Mundy, USMC (ret.)
Former Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command; JINSA Generals & Admirals Program Participant

MajGen Robert Sofge, USMC (ret.)
Former Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa; JINSA Generals & Admirals Program Participant

Ari Cicurel
Associate Director of Foreign Policy

Jonah Brody
Policy Analyst

Sarah Havdala
Policy Analyst

Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary 1

A. U.S. Interests at Stake 1

B. The Persistent Houthi Threat 1

C. Growing Houthi Aggression 2

D. Why the Houthi Threat Endures 3

E. Countering the Houthi Threat 3

II. U.S. Interests at Stake 4

A. Securing Freedom of Navigation 4

B. U.S. Global Credibility 5

III. The Persistent Houthi Threat 8

A. Ideology and Evolution of the Houthi Threat 8

B. Houthi Capabilities and Foreign Support 13

C. Previous Counter-Houthi Efforts 14

IV. Growing Houthi Aggression 15

A. Dynamics that Encouraged Houthi Aggression 15

B. Houthi Aggression Resumes 16

C. A Divided Anti-Houthi Camp 19

D. Two Continents, One Threat 20

E. Houthi Threat to Free Navigation 21

V. Why the Houthi Threat Endures 23

A. Lessons Learned 23

B. Ongoing Challenges 24

VI. Countering the Houthi Threat 26

A. Build Coalitions to Degrade, Defend, and Deny Houthi Aggression 26

B. Establish a Counter-Houthi Threat Finance Cell 29

C. Expand Access and Coordination on the African Shore 29

D. Build a Credible Yemeni Alternative to the Houthis 29

VII. Conclusion 30

Endnotes 31

I. Executive Summary

Despite ruling only part of one of the Middle East's poorest countries, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis now pose one of the most persistent threats to global commerce and U.S. credibility. The group, a Zaydi Shia Islamist movement armed by Iran and designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States, has long fought for control of Yemen, having seized Sanaa in 2014. That fighting spilled over into Saudi Arabia after 2015 with the kingdom's intervention into the Yemeni Civil War, into the Red Sea after October 2023, and into both of those theaters in 2026. Houthi aggression and continued control of key territory in Yemen threaten key U.S. interests and partners while allowing Iran to hold a second Middle Eastern chokepoint, the Bab el-Mandeb, at risk.

The United States cannot afford to ignore or dismiss this problem. The Iran war will not end, and oil prices will not drop so long as the Yemen front remains active. The Houthi threat has persisted for over a decade due to ongoing Iranian support and a fragmented and uncoordinated regional response. To keep oil flowing to global markets and secure America's friends abroad, the United States should organize a coalition so Saudi Arabia, Israel, and other regional partners can more cooperatively protect shipping and defend against the group's attacks.

A. U.S. Interests at Stake

The Houthi campaign endangers two interrelated U.S. interests in freedom of navigation and American credibility with partners and adversaries. Houthi threats against the Red Sea corridor undermine the open sea lanes that underpin American prosperity and the global economy.

When Iran began its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz in early March, the Gulf, along with global oil markets, increasingly relied on the Red Sea for the flow of oil. Export flows through the Strait of Hormuz have since recovered, but attacks on international shipping have not ceased, hitting a record high in October and resulting in a situation where flows are highly volatile.[1] Should traffic through the Strait of Hormuz cease again, either as a result of renewed hostilities with Iran or insurers losing confidence in the route, the Red Sea could again become the main passage for Gulf oil, meaning Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and Red Sea shipping could have repercussions on oil prices.

Washington's response will also shape U.S. credibility with adversaries and partners alike. China and other states will draw lessons from the outcome about whether coercion at a chokepoint brings more gains than costs. A visible failure to protect regional partners under Houthi fire would also give Gulf states greater reason to hedge toward China. Additionally, ending Iran's "ability to arm proxies" was an explicit goal of Operation Epic Fury, and a war that ends with the Houthis holding more territory now than they did in February would hand Tehran a victory.[2]

B. The Persistent Houthi Threat

The Houthis, with Iranian backing, funds, and weapons, have built a durable military threat that ceasefires and partial campaigns have failed to dismantle. Over the course of two decades, the Houthis evolved from a small group of fighters in northern Yemen into a force capable of striking Riyadh and Tel Aviv and sinking merchant ships, supported by Iranian designs, components, and smuggling networks operating by sea, land, and air, as well as by missile components increasingly sourced from Chinese suppliers. Houthi leaders frame their fight against the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia as a religious mission reaching beyond Yemen. The group has rearmed after every pause in fighting, which makes truces a poor guarantee of security for its neighbors.

The Houthis have twice before sparked wars. In 2014, they seized Yemen's capital, sought to take over the country, and when Saudi Arabia sought to stop them, launched thousands of projectiles into the kingdom. Ten years later, as Israel was fighting to defend itself after Hamas's October 7 attack, the Houthis joined the war by attacking commercial shipping through the Red Sea. Their latest offensive, which began in July 2026, combines elements of both these prior wars.

C. Growing Houthi Aggression

The Houthis escalated in stages, moving from a blockade of Saudi shipping to strikes on Saudi energy infrastructure and a land grab along the Bab el-Mandeb. After forces of Yemen's internationally recognized government (IRG) struck Sanaa's airport in July to stop an Iranian flight carrying arms and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers, the group broke its four-year truce with Riyadh, declared a blockade of Saudi ports, and attacked Saudi vessels at sea. In September, it raised its rate of fire at Saudi targets 910 percent over August, struck Aramco facilities, and seized Mocha, Dhubab, and nearby islands, which briefly gave it positions overlooking the Bab el-Mandeb. A government counteroffensive backed by Saudi airpower recovered Mocha and Dhubab by early October, yet the Houthis kept striking Saudi airports and oil facilities and tightened their siege of Taiz, whose fall would open a path to Aden, the government's de facto capital. By mid-November, Yemeni government forces relocated troops to protect Aden and the surrounding areas, resulting in Houthi forces recapturing a 150-kilometer stretch of land between Dhubab and Khor Amira along the Red Sea, according to Houthi military sources.

This latest war is likely as much an attempt by the Houthis to grab territory and power in Yemen, taking advantage of opportunities offered by divisions among their opponents and Iranian aggression in the Strait of Hormuz, as it is the bidding of their patrons in Tehran. A Saudi-Emirati confrontation over southern Yemen in December 2025 and January 2026 turned the anti-Houthi camp's two main backers against each other and ended with the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) withdrawing its last troops from Yemen. At the same time, the Iran war kept U.S. warships focused on the Gulf and pushed Saudi oil into the Red Sea, which gave the Houthis a new way to squeeze both the Saudi economy and global oil markets. Should fighting between the United States and Iran resume, the Houthis are the partner Tehran is most likely to call on to open a second front, especially as its proxies in Lebanon and Gaza—Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively—are severely weakened.

The Houthi threat no longer stops at Yemen's coast. The group has built smuggling networks, an armed partnership with al-Shabaab, and logistics hubs in Somaliland, Puntland, and Djibouti, where a Houthi cell has used local shell companies to move Iranian missiles, drone parts, and chemicals toward Yemen. Israel and the U.A.E. are building footholds of their own in Somaliland, which gives any campaign against the group a base across the water, yet Saudi-Emirati rivalry across the Horn of Africa threatens to divide the partners best placed to use it.

These developments make the Houthi offensive to seize territory in Yemen and target Saudi Arabia a direct threat to free navigation. Losing the coast near the strait did little to reduce that danger, since the Houthis regained territory along the Red Sea and still hold the shoreline they have used to attack ships since 2023, including the waters off Hodeidah where they sank two bulk carriers in 2025. Since Saudi oil depends on the Red Sea whenever exports through the Strait of Hormuz are disrupted, prolonged Houthi attacks on Saudi airports, oil facilities, and revenue would likely threaten the tankers that transport that oil. To protect its interests in freedom of navigation and demonstrate to its partners and adversaries worldwide the value of American security guarantees, the United States cannot allow the Houthi offensive to go unchecked.

D. Why the Houthi Threat Endures

Years of military pressure failed to eliminate the Houthi threat because Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States pursued policies to address the group independently and according to their own objectives. Although separate Saudi, Israeli, and American campaigns imposed significant material and leadership costs on the Houthis, none succeeded in severing supply networks or securing coastal positions that would prevent the group from rebuilding. Truces and ceasefires protected one country at a time, while maritime coalitions divided responsibility for the Bab el-Mandeb, which lies at the intersection of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) areas of responsibility, leaving one of the region's most contested waterways at the periphery of both commands' priorities.

Countering the Houthis entails significant challenges. The group's drones and missiles are far less expensive than the interceptors required to neutralize them, and its combination of local production and foreign supply lines enables rapid replacement of losses. Houthi fighters have maintained control of Yemen's mountainous north despite more than a decade of coalition pressure. U.S. forces, munitions, and surveillance assets remain devoted to the conflict with Iran and to retaining readiness in the Indo-Pacific. After a quarter century of continuous operations in the region, domestic reservations are growing about further U.S. commitments in the Middle East. Additionally, external pressure alone cannot eliminate the threat, as no unified Yemeni force or functioning government currently exists to seize and hold the territory, ports, and financial flows the Houthis rely on to rebuild. Given these growing constraints on the U.S. side, Washington cannot and should not bear this burden alone. Any effective response must rely on regional partners assuming a greater share of the fighting, with the United States providing the unique capabilities it possesses, from providing intelligence to aerial fuel support.

E. Countering the Houthi Threat

Washington should develop a strategy with its partners against the Houthis that proceeds in parallel with the Iran war to restore freedom of navigation through the Red Sea, defend regional partners against Houthi attacks, and deny the Houthis the capability to sustain strikes against any target. Washington should support that effort with intelligence, weapons, diplomacy, and sanctions, but it should leave the ground war and Yemen's governance to Yemeni and Gulf partners. To that end, the United States should:

- Build coalitions to degrade, defend, and deny Houthi aggression. The Department of Defense (DoD) should coordinate Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Israel, and other partners into linked coalitions, each with its own mission and membership, to degrade Houthi capabilities, defend partners, and block foreign weapons transfers. Partners should conduct most operations along each line of effort, with Washington organizing and enabling them, while the United States supplies the intelligence, coordination, and specialized capabilities that partners lack.
- Establish a counter-Houthi threat finance cell to cut off the money that sustains Houthi weapons procurement and operations.
- Expand access to additional facilities along the Horn of Africa so that operations at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait no longer depend on one host government in Djibouti.
- Build a credible Yemeni alternative to the Houthis by working with Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. to help unify the anti-Houthi forces in Yemen and support a government capable of effective, uncorrupt governance. Any gains will last only briefly if the Houthis can maintain a grip on the coastline, ports, and revenue they need to rearm.

II. U.S. Interests at Stake

The freedom of navigation for ships to transit international waters safely underpins both American prosperity and the global economy. Roughly 80 percent of global goods transit by sea and often must pass through a handful of narrow straits where even a temporary blockage delays deliveries, raises shipping costs, and drives up global prices.[3] Since March, Iran has exploited its location on the Strait of Hormuz to threaten shipping and drive up energy costs in order to increase political pressure on the United States. Now, the Houthis, Tehran's Yemeni proxy, are replicating that strategy at another critical chokepoint, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, putting at risk the access on which American economic interests, and one of the country's oldest national security tenets, depend.

Since the Barbary Wars of the early 19th century, the United States has treated freedom of navigation as a core national interest and has used its naval power to keep international waterways open for American commerce.[4] After the Second World War, that commitment extended to partner nations' commerce as it became a foundation of the international economic order the United States built—an order that depends on the predictable movement of goods, energy, and military forces through a small number of global maritime chokepoints. Emphasizing this importance, the 2025 National Security Strategy lists "preserving freedom of navigation in all crucial sea lanes" and preventing any one adversary from dominating "the Middle East, its oil and gas supplies, and the chokepoints through which they pass" among the United States' "core, vital national interests."[5]

As Iran demonstrated in the Strait of Hormuz this year, an armed group does not need to fully close a chokepoint to exercise leverage over it. Making passage dangerous enough can cause shipping companies to choose to avoid navigating the waterway. A sufficiently credible threat can cause insurers to raise premiums, carriers to suspend transit, and vessels to divert onto longer, more expensive routes in order to mitigate risks.

A. Securing Freedom of Navigation

Because the United States has always depended on trade with other nations for its prosperity, freedom of navigation has shaped its national security policy and its place in the world since independence. The founders debated building a navy largely to protect the new nation's commercial interests from piracy and foreign interference, and, in 1797, President John Adams pressed Congress to ensure that American commerce would "receive an adequate protection." As American power grew, presidents made the principle a pillar of the international order the United States sought to build, including Woodrow Wilson, who placed "absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas" second among his Fourteen Points, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who issued the 1941 Atlantic Charter that envisioned a peace in which all nations could "traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance."[6]

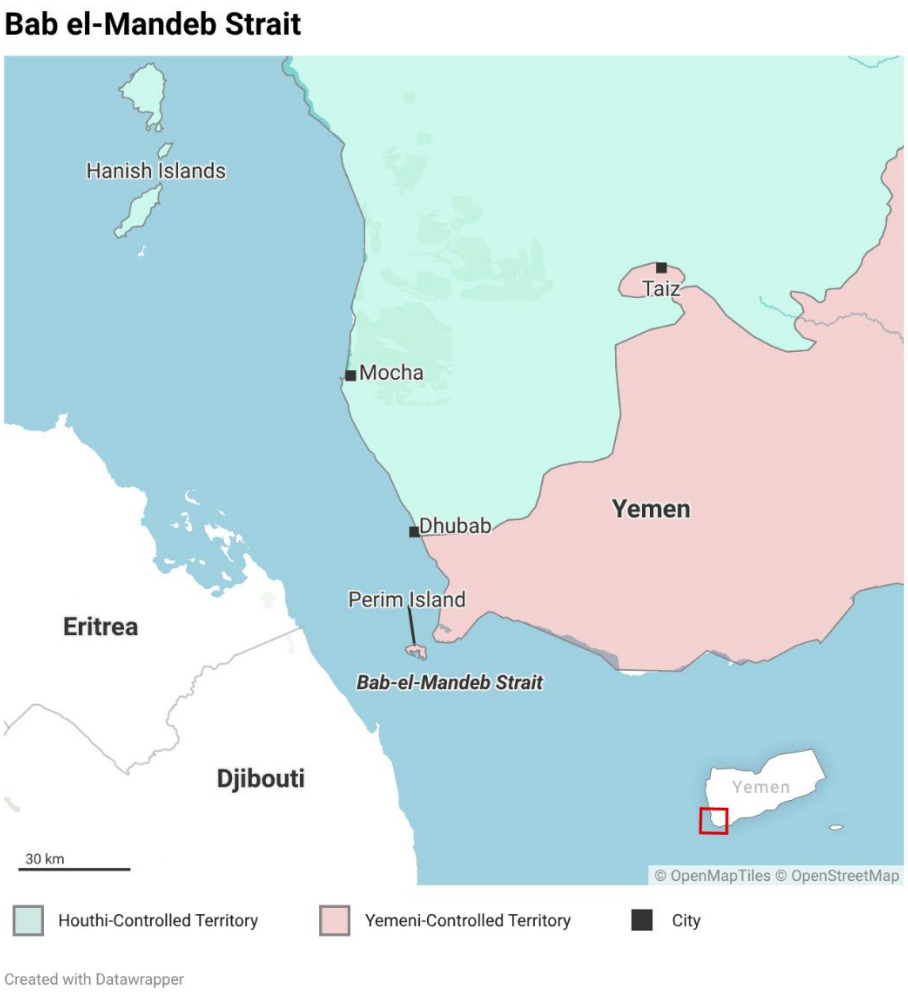
That commitment has held across parties and decades as open sea lanes have remained vital to allowing the United States to project military power abroad and its commerce to flow freely. When discussing a 1971 fisheries dispute with Ecuador, President Richard Nixon summed up the American position to his national security advisor: "Navigation we want. Let them fish if they want."[7] The United States has filed more than 140 diplomatic protests against excessive maritime claims since 1948, and since 1979 its Freedom of Navigation Program has also challenged such claims at sea, contesting those of 26 states in fiscal year 2018 alone.[8] Every National Security Strategy of the 21st century, with the exception of the 2006 edition, has committed the United States to securing freedom of navigation, free access to the seas, or open sea lanes.

i. The Red Sea's Importance to International Shipping

Since the Bab el-Mandeb concentrates large volumes of international commerce within a narrow geographic space, even a relatively small military force there can impose costs far beyond the immediate region. At only 20 miles wide at its narrowest point, the strait sits between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa and forms the southern gateway to the corridor linking Asian markets across the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean Sea, and Europe. Before the latest shipping disruptions at the hands of the Houthis, the Red Sea corridor carried roughly 30 percent of global container traffic, 15 percent of global oil and shipping transits—worth approximately $1 trillion—as well as 95 percent of maritime commerce between Europe and Asia.[9] Ships using this route must pass through the Bab el-Mandeb at the corridor's southern entrance and the Suez Canal at its northern end, with the two points handling between 10 and 15 percent of global trade and approximately 30 percent of container traffic.[10]

The Houthis demonstrated after October 2023 how the threat of attack alone can disrupt commerce through a major waterway. Major container lines suspended Red Sea transits within weeks of the group issuing multiple threats to target international shipping. The cost of shipping a 40-foot container from Shanghai, China, to Rotterdam, the Netherlands, more than doubled in a single week in early January 2024, from $1,910 to $3,577, while war-risk insurance premiums rose from roughly $50,000 per Red Sea transit before the crisis to as much as $1 million for a median container ship by mid-January 2024, and premiums for a new very large crude carrier reached roughly $1.3 million.[11] Red Sea traffic, which before October 2023 averaged roughly 80 weekly transits carrying 3.4 million metric tons, subsequently fell by roughly two-thirds and remained low even after the May 2025 U.S.-Houthi ceasefire. After renewed Houthi attacks beginning in July 2026, shipping companies reduced weekly transits even further, from roughly 38 to 25, and halved cargo volume to 750,000 metric tons.[12]

Rerouting ships around Africa reduced their exposure to Houthi attacks but turned security risk into a standing cost on the goods, energy, and industrial inputs that would otherwise move through the chokepoint. Sailing around the Cape of Good Hope adds as much as 6,000 nautical miles and two weeks to Asia-Europe voyages, increases fuel consumption, occupies vessels for longer periods, and raises insurance and freight rates. During the Houthi campaign that began in October 2023, diversions around southern Africa increased by 74 percent. Research estimates that each additional day in transit imposes costs equivalent to a tariff of roughly 0.6 to 2.1 percent of the value of the good, so a two-week diversion adds the equivalent of roughly $8,400 to $29,400 in tariffs to a $100,000 shipment of time-sensitive goods.[13] Nor is the economic damage isolated to the producers or consumers of affected goods. As transits fell, Egypt's Suez Canal revenue dropped from $10.25 billion in 2023 to $3.99 billion in 2024.[14]



ii. Dangers of a Two Chokepoint War

The Bab el-Mandeb's growing importance reflects not just its role as the most direct route from the Indian Ocean to Europe but also the limited alternatives available for Gulf oil to bypass Hormuz. Iran's ongoing attempts to blockade the Strait of Hormuz since March have made the Red Sea an increasingly important alternate petroleum export route for the Gulf, which in turn has increased the Bab el-Mandeb's importance to global energy markets. Prior to the blockade, an average of 20 million barrels per day (mb/d) transited the Strait of Hormuz, accounting for about 25 percent of global seaborne oil trade.[15] As shipments through Hormuz fell sharply during the first half of 2026, Middle Eastern oil exports through the Bab el-Mandeb climbed from 5.4 mb/d in the first quarter to 8.1 mb/d in the second—a 50 percent jump.[16]

Gulf producers have few ways around Hormuz, and the largest of them still ends at the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) operate the principal pipeline routes capable of bypassing Hormuz, while additional capacity through Iraq and Turkey remains comparatively constrained.[17] Saudi Arabia's East-West Pipeline is the largest alternative, carrying 7 mb/d of crude across the kingdom to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, of which 5 mb/d is available for exports. In January and February, Yanbu exports only averaged 770,000 barrels per day, with that figure rising to 4 mb/d by mid-March.[18] Because Asian markets purchase roughly 80 percent of Saudi crude exports, much of that oil must travel south through

the Bab el-Mandeb.[19] Suez Canal size restrictions also limit the ability of the largest tankers to carry crude from Yanbu north toward Europe.

With Iran and its proxies exerting simultaneous pressure on both Hormuz and the one route that would normally let shippers at least partially circumvent it—the Bab el-Mandeb—they have magnified global costs and shipping disruptions. The maritime system ordinarily compensates for disruption by shifting cargoes, export infrastructure, and shipping toward alternative routes, but that resilience erodes when multiple chokepoints in the same regional trading system become unsafe at once. Although shipping through the Strait of Hormuz is recovering to pre-war figures, the threat Iran poses to international shipping has not fully dissipated, as Tehran continues to target vessels in the waterway. Should Iran succeed in cutting daily Hormuz transits during a renewed conflict, the Bab el-Mandeb will again become one of the principal routes available to offset those losses. And if the Houthis still hold the Bab el-Mandeb hostage with Hormuz under siege, it will compound the effects of the Iranian blockade, while also impeding Europe-Asia commerce. The 1967–1975 closure of the Suez Canal shows how long such losses persist: trade between countries whose shipping routes lengthened by more than half during that crisis fell by over 20 percent and recovered only gradually after the canal reopened. Shipping cost shocks also raise inflation about as much as oil price shocks and persist longer, so a Bab el-Mandeb disruption would layer a second, more durable price shock onto the energy shock from Hormuz.

B. U.S. Global Credibility

How the United States defends freedom of navigation in one waterway shapes how partners and adversaries judge America's will to preserve its commitment to freedom of navigation everywhere. Governments well beyond the Middle East are watching whether coercion at a chokepoint pays. If they determine that it does—that Iran and the Houthis benefited more than they lost from their attempts to close regional waterways to shipping—other states might well begin replicating these tactics.

Iran's attempt to monetize Hormuz has already tempted other states to weigh the same tactic. When Iran announced its intention to toll the Strait of Hormuz, Indonesia's finance minister suggested that Jakarta might follow suit in the Strait of Malacca, which carries roughly 29 percent of global maritime oil flows and could generate more than $72 billion a year for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, before walking the idea back.[20] Each chokepoint that one state, or nonstate actor, successfully closes or monetizes lowers the cost for the next government or group tempted to try. Thus, a Houthi toll or blockade at the Bab el-Mandeb would add a second Middle Eastern precedent for such moves within a single year.

China is reading the same events as evidence that the U.S.-led maritime order is open to revision. A May report from a think tank attached to China's Ministry of State Security argued that the United States "has begun to turn away from the system it created," and Chinese strategists see the Middle East war as having worn down U.S. Navy ships and drawn down the munitions needed to deter Beijing in the South China Sea.[21] China may already feel emboldened. Between July and September, the U.S. Coast Guard observed four Chinese vessels within the United States' exclusive economic zone in the Bering Strait chokepoint that links Arctic and Pacific Ocean sea lanes, compared to just five Chinese vessels that were observed in all of 2025.[22] If Iran and its proxy can hold two chokepoints at risk and outlast U.S. pressure, Beijing will conclude that Washington can be fought to a stalemate by an adversary willing to absorb economic pain, a template it could apply to a future blockade of Taiwan.[23]

Partners are watching as closely as adversaries. When the United States reflagged and escorted Kuwaiti tankers through Hormuz during Operation Earnest Will in 1987, the aim was to restore certainty to energy markets and insurance rates and to assure Gulf partners that American protection would hold

under fire.[24] A visible failure to defend passage at the Bab el-Mandeb would send the opposite signal. Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, whose exports could again become heavily dependent on the Red Sea, would have greater reason to hedge toward China.

Washington's failure to confront the Houthis decisively has undermined U.S. credibility and emboldened a regional threat to global shipping. Successive administrations treated the group as a secondary problem, allowing it to grow from a local insurgency into a force capable of endangering two continents. The Obama administration backed the Saudi-led intervention in 2015 without a plan to counter the Houthis' expanding missile arsenal.[25] The Trump administration continued that support as the Houthis developed long-range strike capabilities, but only designated them a terrorist organization at the end of its term.[26] The Biden administration revoked that designation weeks later and relied on defensive operations and limited strikes, none of which restored secure commercial passage.[27] Failing to address the Houthis' capabilities and supply lines has enabled each new round of attacks, reinforcing the perception that the United States is unwilling or unable to protect its partners and its own interests.

The stakes are equally high for the current Trump administration, as dismantling Iran's proxy network is an explicit U.S. objective in the Iran war. When the United States launched Operation Epic Fury on February 28, 2026, President Donald Trump said its goal was to ensure that "the Iranian regime cannot continue to arm, fund, and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders," and the White House cited "significantly weakening [Iranian] proxies" as a measure of operational success.[28] Should the war end with Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) and Hamas weak but the Houthis in a place of strength, one holding more territory and able to threaten a second Middle East chokepoint, Tehran will be able to claim a victory. Partners and adversaries alike would read such an outcome as an Iranian victory, as well as a sign that U.S. objectives can be outlasted due to weak American resolve.

III. The Persistent Houthi Threat

The Houthis' ability to target their enemies, retain territory, and disrupt commercial shipping demonstrates the group's strength in the face of repeated efforts to diminish their threat. Despite international military operations, the Saudi-led blockade, and the active United Nations (UN) arms embargo on Yemen, in place since 2015, the Houthis have developed and refined their ability to domestically produce advanced weapons in addition to importing arms components from Iran and other foreign sources.[29] Drawing on that arsenal, the Houthis have recently exploited regional conflicts to target their enemies and capture key parts of Yemen's Red Sea coast. That resilience makes the Houthis harder to combat than their size suggests, since a decade of blockades, airstrikes, and embargoes has taught the group to absorb pressure and keep fighting.

A. Ideology and Evolution of the Houthi Threat

The threat the Houthis pose to Red Sea shipping today is the direct result of the group's over two decades of continuous military development, driven by a religious ideology that commits the movement to direct confrontation with its enemies. Over the course of six conflicts with the internationally recognized Yemeni government between 2004 and 2010, the Houthis turned themselves from a small band of poorly equipped fighters into a larger force capable of taking over towns, forcing government-backed brigades to surrender, and carrying out raids in neighboring Saudi Arabia.

i. An Ideological Movement

The Houthis, who call their movement Ansarallah, grew out of a Zaydi religious revival in northern Yemen during the 1980s and 1990s and take their name from the al-Houthi family, a prominent clan from Yemen's northern Saada governate whose members led that revival. Zaydis, concentrated in Yemen's northern highlands, follow a branch of Shia Islam distinct from the Twelver Shiism practiced in Iran, and Zaydi communities historically resisted doctrinal absorption into Iran's Twelver tradition, including forced conversions under the Safavids in the sixteenth century.[30] A Zaydi imamate, with varying territorial reach, ruled much of northern Yemen for centuries until the 1962 revolution overthrew the Kingdom of Yemen and established the Yemen Arab Republic. In the decades that followed, traditional Zaydi religious institutions and elites lost influence while Saudi-funded Salafism expanded into historically Zaydi areas, particularly around Saada, helping fuel a religious and political revival opposed to growing Saudi influence.[31] The al-Houthi family belonged to Zaydism's minority Jarudi strand, whose views on religious and political authority place it closer than other Zaydi schools to broader Shia traditions.[32] Jarudis treat descent from the Prophet Muhammad as a strict condition for legitimate rule and hold that this divine right extends beyond Yemen to the entire world.[33]

The Houthis' alignment with Iran and LH is rooted in a shared revolutionary ideology, which Tehran and Beirut have supported through training, weapons, logistics, and financial assistance. Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Husayn, the movement's founding leader, embraced the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and Zaydi activists of Husayn's generation came to see its mobilization against foreign powers and unjust rulers as the true expression of Zaydism, despite doctrinal differences between the two traditions.[34] Iran, for its part, sought to "export [its] Islamic revolution" by backing like-minded groups across the region, and the Houthis became one of its beneficiaries.[35] Beginning in 1994, the Houthi family sent approximately 800 students to seminaries in the Iranian city of Qom, some of whom reportedly received paramilitary training from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).[36] In 2000, Husayn adopted the movement's current slogan, "Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam."[37] His brother and eventual successor, Abdulmalik al-Houthi, modeled himself after LH leader Hassan Nasrallah, including the establishment of an LH-style "Jihad Council" to oversee Houthi military affairs.[38] LH advisers subsequently instructed Houthi fighters in anti-tank, mine, and anti-shipping tactics. Iranian arms shipments to the Houthis were reported as early as 2009. By the time of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen in March 2015, Iran had reportedly established a twice-daily Mahan Air route to Sanaa to transport trainers and equipment.[39] Following the onset of the Saudi intervention, Iran provided the Houthis with an estimated $30 million per month in fuel, as well as the designs and components for Houthi missiles, drones, and explosive boats.[40]

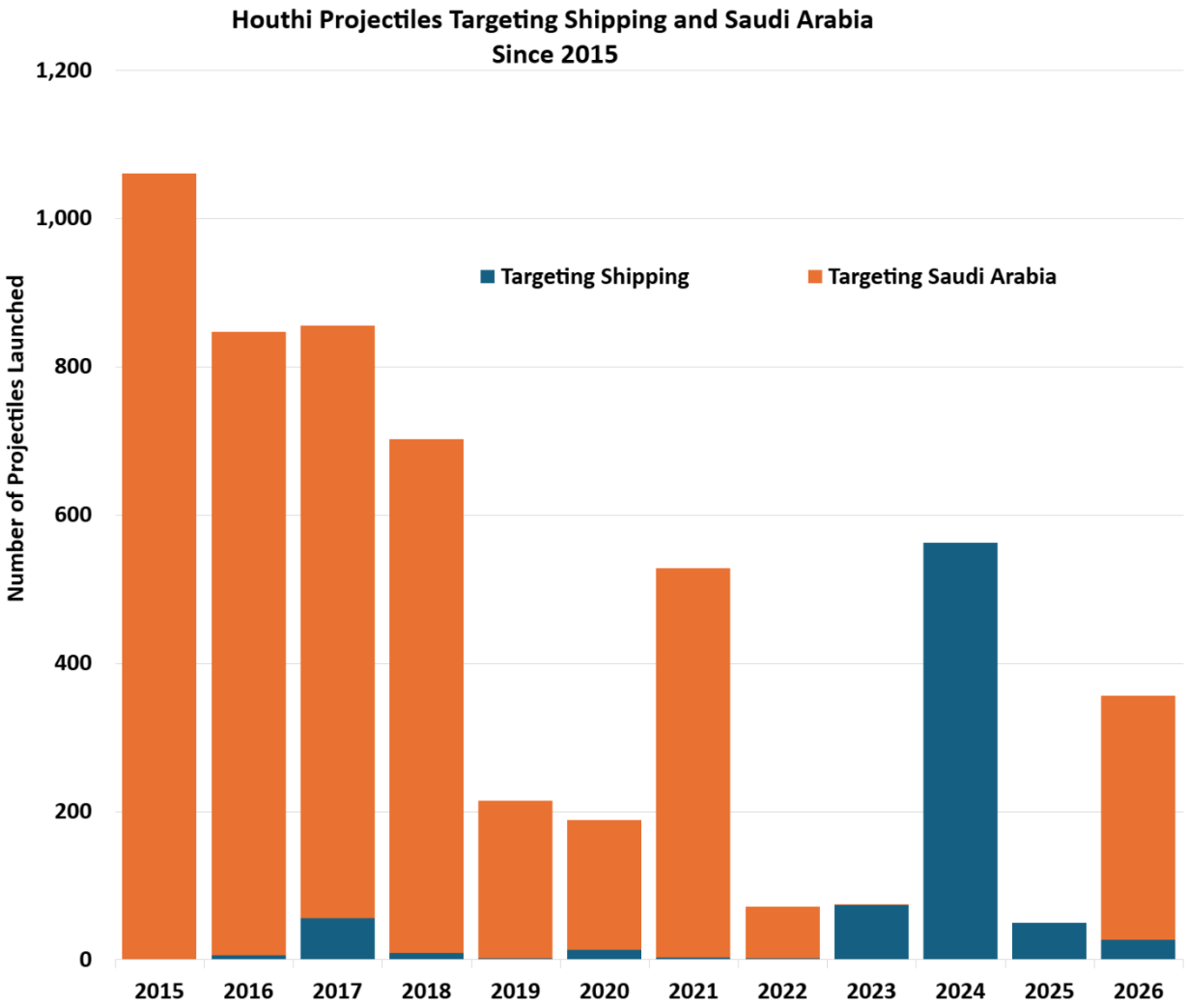
The Houthis pursue religious and political objectives that ceasefires or territorial compromises are unlikely to address. The group venerates Husayn al-Houthi as the "Talking Quran" and bases its indoctrination curriculum on his lectures, which urge jihad against the United States and Israel. The movement's slogan, which banners throughout Houthi-controlled terrain display prominently, identifies these adversaries, while its leaders link their military campaigns to a Shia prophecy that predicts a Yemeni leader with the "most righteous banner" will gather support for the Mahdi, who will receive allegiance in Mecca before conquering Jerusalem.[41] Taken literally, the prophecy requires Houthi-aligned forces to take Mecca in their "global jihadi effort," as one Yemen expert labels it, that aims to "unite the Muslim world."[42] Houthi officials describe their mission in maximalist terms that signal the group has an appetite for territory beyond just Yemen. In January 2024, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of the group's Supreme Political Council, stated that "Islam is the religion of the entire world. We have the legitimacy to move to the end of the earth."[43]

ii. A Continuous Threat

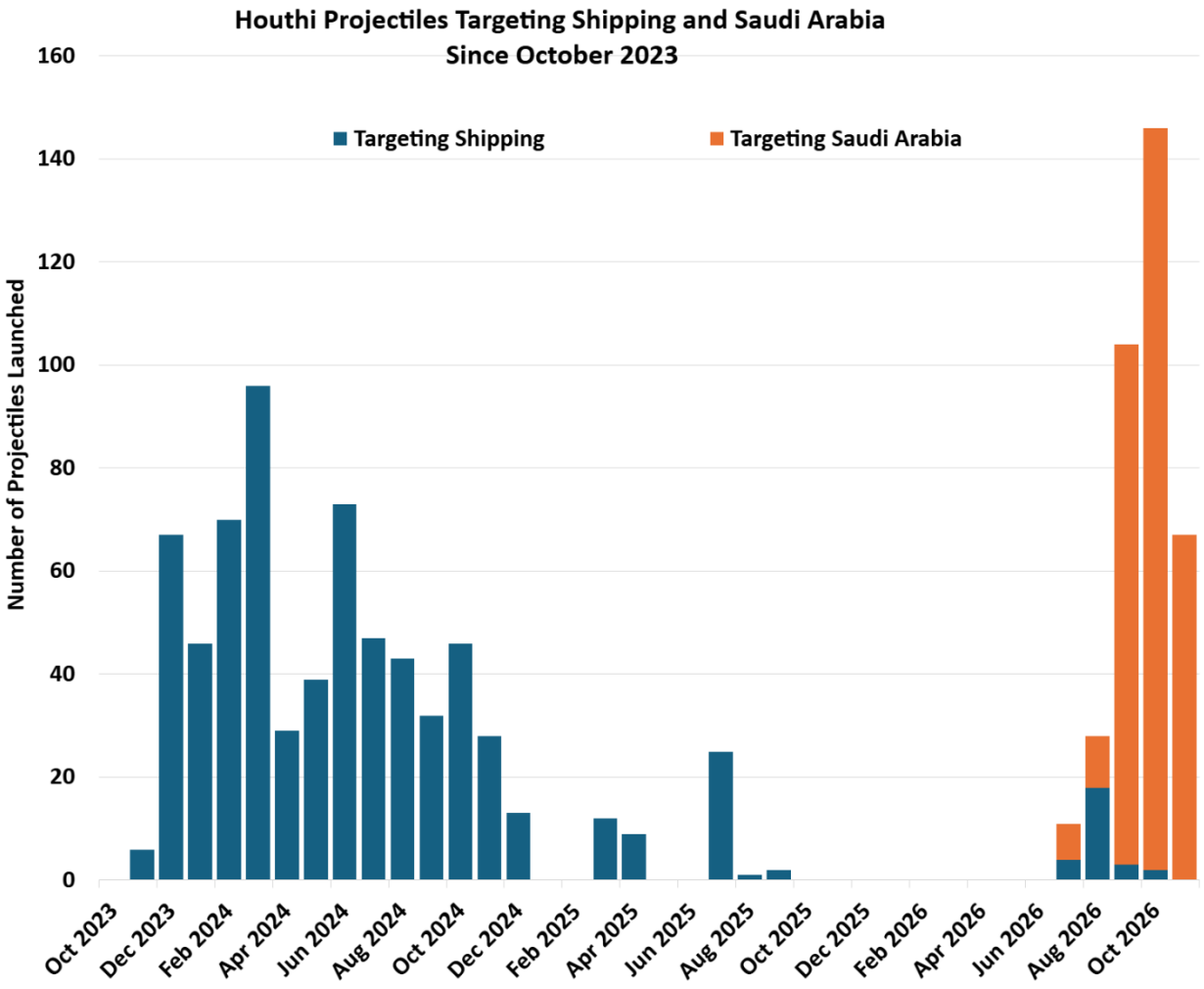
The collapse of the Yemeni state after 2011 handed the Houthis the territory and heavy weapons that turned a rebel movement into an army. In the wake of the Yemeni revolution in 2011—during which an Arab Spring uprising forced long-serving President Ali Abdullah Saleh from power—the Houthis spread all over northern Yemen, took control of Sanaa in September 2014, and later formed an alliance with deposed President Saleh.[44] As a result of their new control, the Houthis captured entire brigades of tanks and artillery; 33 Scud-B missiles; and the Yemeni military's coastal defense forces.[45] In addition to capturing Yemen's largest city and capital during the ensuing civil war, the Houthis increased their territorial control by 300 percent, from 30,000 square kilometers in 2014 to 120,000 square kilometers in 2015.[46]

Saudi Arabia's March 2015 intervention in Yemen's civil war—at the head of a nine-nation coalition that included Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the U.A.E.—ultimately sped up the Houthis' evolution into a military threat for the region by giving them both the incentive and external assistance needed to develop long-range strike capabilities. Weeks into the campaign, Abdulmalik al-Houthi vowed that Yemen "will never give in—it will resist in the face of the savage aggression."[47] The Houthis, unable to challenge the coalition's air superiority, retaliated by using the weapons they captured from Yemen's military—including Scud missiles—to target Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., while Iran and LH supplied advisers, weapon components, and technical designs. In May 2017, the Houthis began targeting locations in Saudi territory over 600 miles from northern Yemen launch sites with indigenously produced weapons, such as the Burkan-2.[48] A UN panel later found that Iran had developed the Burkan-2 as a lighter version of the Iranian Qiam-1 short-range ballistic missile.[49] Between 2017 and 2022, the Saudi intervention against the Houthis became increasingly attritional, as the Houthis used their improved domestic weapon capabilities to target and impose costs on Saudi Arabia while facing continuous coalition airstrikes. As Saudi-backed forces closed in on the port of Hodeidah in 2018, Abdulmalik al-Houthi dismissed the idea that losing territory would force the group to yield, saying, "This is not happening and will not happen ever."[50] When the April 2022 UN-brokered truce came into effect, the Houthis had endured seven years of pressure from the coalition and had kept control of northwestern Yemen, in addition to retaining a large portion of their arsenal.

With their territorial base and long-range strike capabilities intact, the Houthis found a new opening to project power across the region when Hamas carried out its attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, which gave the Houthis the chance to direct their military forces against even more distant adversaries and international commerce. On October 31, the Houthis fired the first medium-range ballistic missile at Israel by any member of Iran's regional alliance.[51] By the end of that year, the group had launched at least 49 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones toward Israel at ranges of up to 1,900 kilometers, although none of the projectiles reached or struck their intended targets.[52] In November, their regional threat expanded to the Red Sea as they seized the *Galaxy Leader* with helicopter-deployed commandos, taking the 25 members of the crew aboard hostage and then using the ship for propaganda purposes.[53] In December, the group widened its declared targets from Israeli-owned ships to all vessels bound for Israeli ports, thereby exposing far more ships transiting the Red Sea to attack.[54] A group that had only targeted its adversaries with strikes in sovereign territory shifted to attack commercial vessels in neutral, international waters to inflict economic damage.



The Houthi campaign grew deadlier in 2024 because it expanded its target list to include Western naval forces and adapted its tactics to counter defensive measures. In retaliation for the start of U.S. and British strikes in January, the Houthis designated American and British vessels as legitimate targets, with Mohammed Ali al-Houthi declaring there was "absolutely no red line when confronting the Americans, the Israelis, and those who orbit around them."[55] Between October 2023 and April 2024, the Houthis launched an average of 33 drones per month, more than 300 percent above their monthly rate of drone fire at Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 2022. During the same period, the group fired 116 ballistic missiles and 16 cruise missiles, with 94 of the ballistic missiles aimed at commercial vessels.[56] The Houthis also began employing combined tactics, using explosive boats and successive strikes to first disable and then destroy targeted ships. For example, an unmanned explosive boat crippled the *Tutor* in June 2024 before it ultimately sank, and in August of that year, the Houthis disabled the tanker *Sounion*, which was carrying approximately one million barrels of crude oil, then boarded and detonated explosives aboard the vessel. Approximately 38 percent of Houthi attacks on shipping reached their targets despite the near-continuous presence of a U.S. carrier group, and in July 2024, a Houthi drone struck central Tel Aviv, resulting in one civilian fatality.[57]



Beginning in 2025, the Houthis would strategically adjust their target list by both narrowing and expanding it as a means of coercion. The Houthis renewed their threats against Israeli-linked shipping in March, which led the United States to launch Operation Rough Rider. The air campaign resulted in a Houthi pledge to end attacks on American shipping, but left open the possibility for the group to continue targeting Israeli-linked shipping.[58] In July, Houthi attacks on the bulk carriers *Magic Seas* and *Eternity C* led to their sinking, which brought the group's total number of sunk vessels to four.[59] Attacks on Israel continued throughout the summer and into the fall, but the Houthis remained faithful to their deal with the United States, demonstrating that the Houthis viewed commitments made to one adversary as fully compatible with simultaneous attacks on another one.

The Houthis ceased attacks on Israel and international shipping after the October 2025 Gaza ceasefire went into effect, but the temporary cessation in hostilities did not diminish the fundamental threat the group posed.[60] In December 2025, Abdulmalik al-Houthi declared that "future rounds of confrontation with the Zionist enemy are certain."[61] The Houthis maintained—in addition to their territorial control—experienced commanders and launch crews, along with the production and supply systems they built over a decade of continuous conflict. By mid-2026, the Houthis' operational record showed that they could strike targets hundreds of miles away, from Riyadh to Tel Aviv, and sink passing merchant ships in the Red Sea. Above all, the Houthis recognized the vulnerability of commercial shipping and the leverage they could exert, as their actions rerouted most international shipping away from the Red Sea and

around the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa, a lesson that led to their renewed escalation starting in July 2026.

B. Houthi Capabilities and Foreign Support

The Houthis' ability to maintain fire rests on an arsenal that blends Iranian missile and drone designs with growing local production, making it hard to destroy their ability to rearm. Although the group's exact inventory count remains unknown, the group owns a vast array of arms, including cruise and ballistic missiles, drones, and anti-ship weapons, some of which provide the group with a targeting range of over 1,500 miles, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.[62] The Houthis have also published images and videos of their arsenal, displaying weapons mirroring those of Iran, such as the Hatem medium-range ballistic missile, which resembles Tehran's Kheibar Shekan.[63]

While the Houthis are increasingly becoming capable of domestically producing some components of their weapons with artificial intelligence tools, 3-D printing, and Iranian design blueprints, they still depend on foreign components, such as engines, guidance units, avionics, and specialized electronics smuggled into the country via land, air, and sea routes.[64] Their largest supplier, Iran, has long contributed to the Houthis' overall success by providing them with access to advanced technology and sophisticated arms since 2009.[65] Even as international forces imposed arms embargoes and blockades on Yemen's ports, Iran continued to supply the Houthis with military equipment, including rocket launchers, rifles, and machine guns through the Arabian Sea.[66] Iran's three key maritime routes for transporting weapons to the Houthis include directly shipping cargo from Bandar Abbas to Yemen's Port of Salif, sending arms to ships near Somalia that then unload the supplies onto Yemeni fishing boats, and shipping weapons to Djibouti, which small dhows then transport back to Yemen's Hodeidah and Salif ports.[67] Furthermore, a UN report in 2022 also revealed that many shipments originated from Iran's Jask port and arrived in Yemen on small wooden boats.[68] More recent UN reports, coupled with arms data, suggest that Chinese companies are also providing dual-use technologies to the Houthis, enabling them to import weapons components under the cover of civilian shipments.[69]

In addition to sea routes, Iran has used alternate forms of transportation to smuggle weapons into Yemen. Iran has repeatedly attempted to transport Iranian military commanders and weapons equipment into Yemen's airports. Notably, reports suggest that Iran's sanctioned Mahan Air carries unmanned aerial vehicles and ballistic missiles disguised as medical aid into Yemen—the same airline whose plane carrying IRGC commanders and weapons attempted to land in Sanaa in July.[70] Furthermore, smugglers have also exploited Oman's land border with Yemen to covertly deliver weapons, explosives, financial aid, and personnel support to the Houthis. According to a Yemeni military source in 2016, weapons smuggling often occurs through the Shehen point in Yemen's eastern Mahra governate due to the area's weak security authority.[71]

Chinese suppliers also offer the Houthis a path to Iran's most capable missiles that bypasses Iran itself. Yemeni authorities interdicted two shipments in 2025 carrying components from a Chinese precision-metal producer for a Houthi version of the Kheibar Shekan, including airframe parts, solid-propellant motor parts, and fins built specifically for missile use. Chinese companies have become the largest source of seized goods bound for the Houthis and host most of the group's U.S.-sanctioned drone parts suppliers, so cutting off Iranian deliveries alone would no longer halt Houthi rearmament.[72]

In addition to weaponry, Iran has provided the intelligence necessary for the Houthis to identify ships at sea and targets on land, a capability beyond the reach of their indigenous sensors. Iranian state-owned cargo vessels, equipped as surveillance platforms, have operated near the Bab el-Mandeb for much of the past decade to provide maritime intelligence. The *Saviz* remained off the coast of Eritrea from 2016

until a 2021 limpet-mine attack attributed to Israel forced the ship out of service.[73] Iran replaced the *Saviz* with the *Behshad*, which had onboard maritime radars possessing a 50-nautical-mile range, could receive high-resolution satellite imagery, and transmitted data to Houthi intelligence collectors on fishing boats.[74] In January 2024, the *Behshad* repositioned to the Gulf of Aden, approximately 100 kilometers east of Djibouti, where it reportedly assisted the Houthis in locating passing vessels, until it returned to Iran a month later following a U.S. cyberattack.[75] Iranian personnel have also provided similar support on the ground to identify targets. In January 2024, Reuters reported that IRGC and LH commanders in Yemen were directing and overseeing attacks on Red Sea shipping, with Iranian advisers supplying data to identify vessels bound for Israel. In the same article, a White House official described Iranian tactical intelligence as critical to Houthi targeting.[76] This support is coordinated through officers embedded at the highest levels of the Houthi military. An IRGC Quds Force officer serves on the group's Jihad Council as the Houthi leader's senior military adviser.[77] IRGC commanders were present on the Mahan Air flight that the Yemeni government blocked in July 2026 by bombing the runway at Sanaa airport, and the IRGC has reportedly continued to provide intelligence, tactical guidance, and targeting assistance for Houthi drone and missile operations against Saudi Arabia, and Iranian advisers reportedly directed the Houthis' September offensive from the front lines.[78]

C. Previous Counter-Houthi Efforts

The Houthis' political and military successes in Yemen since capturing key parts of the country in 2015 demonstrate that prior Saudi-led operations, including the ongoing blockade on Yemen, have failed to diminish the group's threat to the region and international shipping. Responding to the Houthis' takeover in Yemen, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of other Sunni Muslim countries with American and British intelligence support while enacting a blockade on its southern neighbor to interdict Iranian shipments from entering the country, as well as quash the rebels' threat to the kingdom and its regional partners.[79] The UN also imposed an arms embargo on Yemen to staunch the flow of weapons to specific Houthi leaders in 2015 and again in 2022 to encompass the entire rebel group.[80] The Houthis withstood that pressure from 2015 to 2022, carrying out 2,968 attacks on Saudi targets with 1,173 missiles and rockets and 656 drones, according to JINSA's Iran Projectile Tracker.[81]

U.S. and partner operations between 2023 and 2025 treated the Houthi threat mainly as a problem of defending ships and hitting launchers, which left the group's capacity to threaten shipping in place. These efforts ranged from defending individual ships and intercepting missiles and drones to conducting limited strikes against the group's launch sites and economic infrastructure. Offensive U.S. measures inflicted substantial damage to the Houthis, yet commercial traffic in their aftermath never recovered to pre-October 2023 levels, partly because carriers and insurers priced in the enduring threat that the United States and its partners never completely removed. Operation Rough Rider, launched more than 16 months after the attacks began, took 52 days, two carrier strike groups, and more than $1 billion to secure a Houthi pledge not to attack U.S. vessels.[82] Yet, this campaign, like the others before it, did not prevent the Houthis from strengthening in Yemen and permitted the group to continue firing at Israel.[83]

Israel, which began striking Yemen in July 2024 in response to months of Houthi missile and drone fire at its territory, broke from earlier campaigns by moving from the group's economic assets to the people who run it, an escalation that Israeli intelligence gains in Yemen made possible. Through 2025, Israeli jets struck ports, fuel depots, power stations, and Sanaa's airport to cut the imports and revenue that fund Houthi operations.[84] In late August 2025, Israeli jets struck a meeting of Houthi officials in Sanaa and killed the prime minister and several ministers, and the group's military chief of staff died of his wounds weeks later.[85] The strike showed new Israeli reach into Houthi leadership circles, yet the prime minister it killed was a southern ally of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who joined the Houthis in

2014, and the strike left Abdulmalik al-Houthi in charge.[86] While Israeli strikes raised the personal cost for Houthi leaders, the group halted its attacks only after the October 2025 Gaza ceasefire removed its stated reason for fighting.[87]

Fragmented maritime coalitions have compounded these failures. Current coalitions to ensure maritime security in the region have become outdated, while international efforts to protect commercial shipping remain uncoordinated and sporadic, resulting in repeated failures to deter the Houthis and interdict weapons entering and exiting Yemen. The Combined Maritime Forces' Task Force 151, the European Union's Operation Atalanta, and the 22-state Djibouti Code of Conduct were all formed between 2008 and 2009 to protect shipping as Somali pirate attacks spread across the Gulf of Aden. With similar, yet separate objectives, these international coalitions sought to defend the region from armed robbery, but governing bodies retrofitted them to address evolving threats in the region after Somali piracy subsided. Even newer coalitions, which formed to address modern threats and ensure regional security, including the Combined Maritime Forces' Task Force 153, the European Union's Aspides, and Saudi Arabia's Multinational Maritime Defense Alliance, remain uncoordinated with varying levels of responsibilities and authorizations.[88]

IV. Growing Houthi Aggression

Rifts between Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., alongside the regional war with Iran, likely encouraged the Houthis to escalate in the summer and fall of 2026, leading to deadly attacks on Saudi Arabia, strikes on Red Sea shipping, and a short-lived takeover of key territory along the Bab el-Mandeb. Anti-Houthi forces recaptured much of that ground, yet the Houthis have continued to fire upon Saudi Arabia and even took some of this land back from Yemen's government. Crucially for freedom of navigation, despite the loss of the coastal territory, the Houthis still maintain the ability to target the Red Sea.

A. Changing Dynamics that Encouraged Houthi Aggression

Three dynamics outside the Houthis' control likely made 2026 the moment to escalate. A Saudi-Emirati split left the camp backing Yemen's internationally recognized government (IRG) divided and weaker on the ground, while the Iran war pushed Saudi oil exports onto the Red Sea and tied down U.S. naval forces in the Gulf. Iran, meanwhile, needed a second front against the United States and Israel in the wake of Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion. Together, those shifts gave the Houthis an opening to seize territory in Yemen and new leverage to pressure Riyadh through the waterway its economy now depends on.

The Saudi-Emirati rivalry weakened the anti-Houthi camp for years before the split that drove the U.A.E. out of Yemen, since Riyadh and Abu Dhabi armed separate factions within Yemen's anti-Houthi forces and held competing goals for the country's south.[89] That rivalry became open confrontation in December 2025, when the U.A.E.-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC), a southern separatist group, seized the Hadramawt and Mahra governorates along the Saudi border. Riyadh read the move as an Emirati push toward its frontier and answered with force, striking a suspected Emirati-linked weapons shipment for the STC in Mukalla, demanding the withdrawal of Emirati troops, and backing the forces that retook both governorates in January. The coalition built to roll back the Houthis' territorial control spent those weeks fighting itself, and the episode ended with the U.A.E., one of its most capable members, pulling its remaining forces out of Yemen.[90] The split also stripped the anti-Houthi camp of one of its main armed factions, which left the IRG's Red Sea strongholds exposed to a Houthi offensive.[91] Within days of the Saudi-Emirati rupture, the STC's leader fled to the U.A.E. and the group dissolved,

removing a southern force that had fought the Houthis and leaving the IRG to hold that ground on its own.[92]

Mounting tensions in the Strait of Hormuz amid the Iran war likely also encouraged the Houthis to take action against their own enemies in July. Iran's ongoing fight with the United States over the Strait of Hormuz put global shipping at risk as ships came under repeated Iranian fire, driving up oil prices sharply and leaving shipping companies to find alternate routes to transport goods. With Saudi Arabia heavily relying upon its East-West Pipeline to transport oil to the Red Sea to bypass the Strait of Hormuz, the Houthis gained leverage over Riyadh and over world energy supplies at a moment when U.S. naval forces were tied down in the Gulf.

Iran's need for a second front in the region gave the Houthis an additional push. With Tehran's primary proxies, LH and Hamas, badly weakened, and its own military under U.S. and Israeli attack, Iran turned to the Houthis as its most effective partner and the one best placed to widen hostilities. Unlike LH and Hamas, the Houthis control territory along the coastline on one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, allowing Iran to threaten global commerce far from its own borders. In addition, Iranian pressure on Red Sea shipping reinforces its strategy by imposing economic costs on the United States and its partners, and forcing Washington to divert military resources dedicated to fighting Iran to the Red Sea to deal with the Houthi threat. The Houthis originally stayed out of the fray in the war's opening weeks, but by July, Iran had helped the group restock its missiles and drones, and was allegedly flying IRGC personnel directly into Sanaa. By threatening Saudi-linked vessels in the Red Sea, the group demonstrated its value to Tehran while also pursuing its own political aims against Saudi Arabia. Despite the Houthis rejecting the notion of being an Iranian proxy, their interests converge with Iran's closely enough to make them Tehran's go-to to open a second front.

B. Houthi Aggression Resumes

The Houthis' return to open conflict in July followed months of regional turmoil that had already weakened deterrence against the group. Until then, the Houthis had limited their involvement in the Iran war to occasional fire at Israel. When Yemen's Saudi-backed IRG struck a Sanaa airport runway in July 2026 to prevent an Iranian plane carrying weapons and IRGC leaders from landing, the Houthis broke their four-year truce with Riyadh by striking Saudi Arabia and announcing a maritime blockade on the kingdom's ports.[93] To exert pressure on Saudi Arabia for the IRG's interference in the Houthis' external affairs and to defend their self-declared sovereign rule over Yemen, the rebel group fired on Saudi ships in the Red Sea as part of the blockade.[94] While the blockade caused significant damage to some Saudi vessels and forced other ships to turn around, it alone failed to deter Saudi Arabia, as Riyadh and its forces in Yemen responded by bombing Houthi military sites and strongholds.[95]

In September, the Houthis pivoted to more forceful operations against Saudi Arabia and Saudi-backed forces in Yemen, especially by targeting the kingdom's energy infrastructure and oil output. The Houthis escalated their drone and missile attacks on Saudi targets along the kingdom's southern coastline, firing at Aramco oil facilities and military sites.[96] The Houthis increased fire at Saudi Arabia by 910 percent, from 10 projectiles in August to 101 in September.[97] Adding to the kingdom's strain, Iran-backed militias in Iraq, coordinating with Houthi fighters, likely fired a drone at Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline on September 11.[98] The attack forced Saudi Arabia to suspend the pipeline's operations for 11 days, leaving the world's second-largest oil producer to rely on secondary outlets to keep exporting.[99] The escalation drew European militaries into the kingdom's defense, as France committed troops and a radar to Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom began refueling Saudi jets countering Houthi attacks.[100]

Mapping the Houthi Conflict

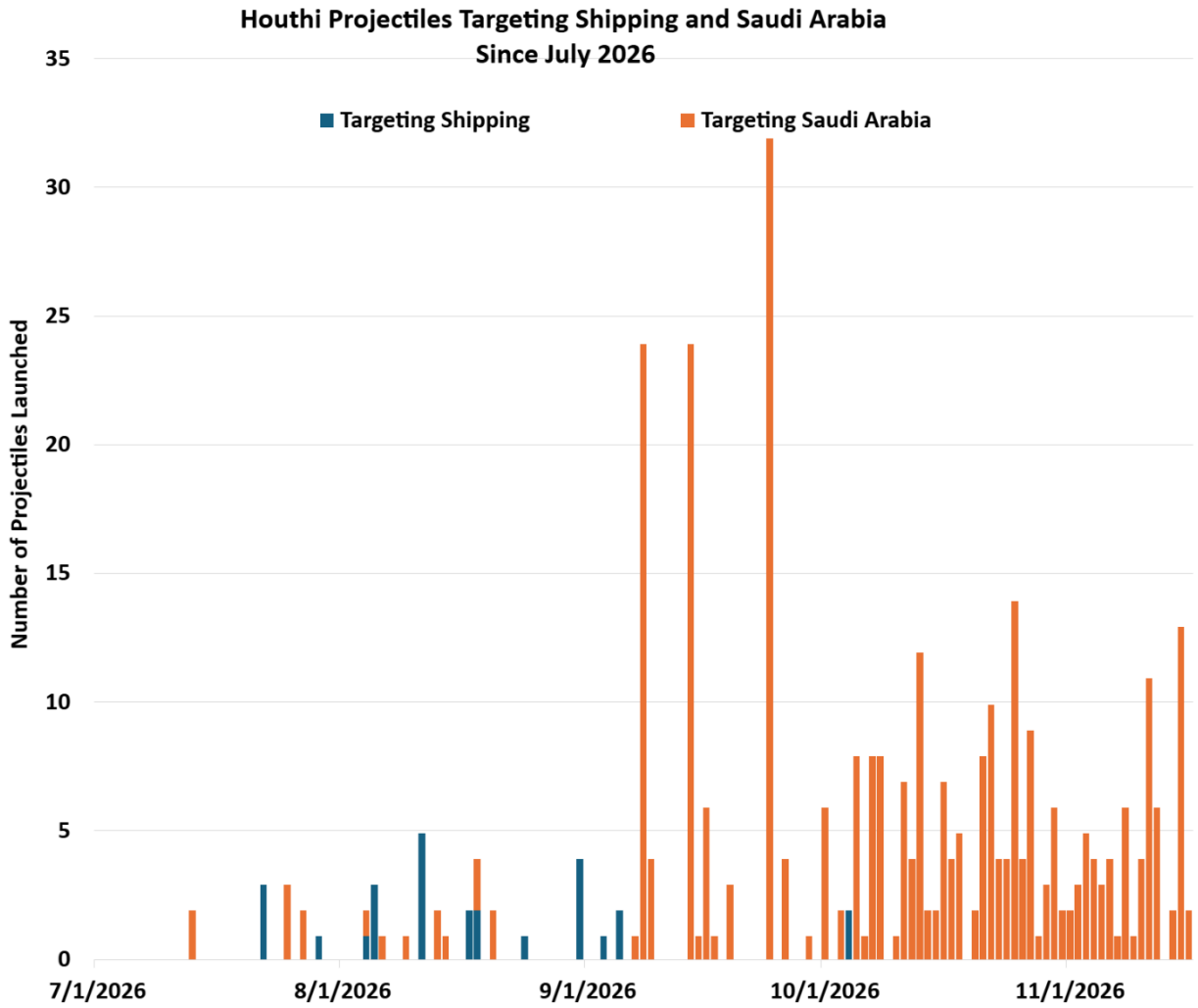


Iran appears to have shaped the timing and targets of the escalation, even as the Houthis pursued their own aims against Riyadh. Reuters reported on July 16 that Tehran had instructed the group to prepare to block shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb if the United States struck Iran's power infrastructure.[101] Ahead of the September offensive, Reuters, citing regional sources, reported that Iran told the Houthis to escalate against Saudi Arabia and promised additional funding, weapons, and senior officers in return, and Yemeni military sources attributed the campaign's direction to Abdolreza Shahlaei, a commander in the IRGC's Quds Force.[102] The Houthis remain the most independent of Iran's partners and had their own grievances against Riyadh, yet an offensive aimed at Saudi oil and the Red Sea export route served Tehran's interest in widening pressure on Gulf energy during its war with the United States.

The Houthis' continued attacks against Saudi Arabia, particularly the kingdom's airports, oil facilities, and Saudi-backed fighters in Yemen, demonstrate a willingness to keep fighting Riyadh and exert pressure on the kingdom even after losing territory along the Bab el-Mandeb. Throughout September and October 2026, the Houthis repeatedly targeted Saudi airports, including by launching several attacks on Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport that killed almost 20 people and left hundreds of others wounded.[103] The deadliest of those strikes came on October 10, when a Houthi missile hit the airport's domestic terminals and killed at least 12 people, including an American citizen, making it the deadliest attack on any Gulf Arab state since the Iran war began.[104] These attacks on Saudi Arabia's aviation sector, which accounts for around 8.5 percent of the entire country's gross domestic product, struck at

one of the kingdom's main sources of revenue.[105] During this time, the group also clashed with anti-Houthi forces in Yemen's strategic Taiz, while the rebels blocked the city's exits.

Washington likely weakened its standing with partners and adversaries by answering a Houthi strike that killed an American citizen with hesitation. Asked whether the United States would join Saudi strikes after the October 10 attack on Riyadh's airport, President Donald Trump answered, "we may. We're going to look at it," and three days later said the group was "behaving very badly."[106] But Houthi attacks are not just misbehavior. Saudi leaders are likely to read that answer as a sign that U.S. protection stops short of the kingdom's own cities. Houthi and Iranian leaders could conclude that the group can strike a U.S. partner and kill an American citizen without drawing a U.S. military response.



Beyond external strikes, the Houthis, desiring full control over Yemen, also capitalized on the resumption of operations to capture key cities and ports in a rapid offensive along Yemen's Red Sea coast, positioning them to control the Bab el-Mandeb. In September, the group seized the city of Mocha, a major IRG stronghold along the Red Sea, in addition to Dhubab, Perim Island, and Greater and Lesser Hanish in the Hanish Islands archipelago.[107] The Houthis increased fire at targets inside Yemen by 170 percent, from 92 projectiles in August to 248 in September, as the ground offensive advanced.[108] If

the Houthis capture Taiz, the group would have a direct path to also controlling the city of Aden, the Yemeni government's de facto capital.[109]

The Houthis' coastal gains proved fragile once Saudi airpower backed a government counteroffensive, though the reversal left much of the group's threat to shipping intact. Following the September offensive, the IRG launched a major ground operation, with Saudi air support, to reclaim Houthi strongholds throughout the country. Operation Dawn of Yemen led to the IRG's recapture of Mocha and several areas within the Dhubab district along the Red Sea, reversing the Houthis' short-lived gains. However, by mid-November, increased Houthi pressure near Aden prompted government forces to surge troops to Aden and the surrounding areas, enabling the Houthis to recapture a 150-kilometer stretch along the Red Sea coast between Dhubab to Khor Amira. Control of Perim Island remains unclear, but government forces reached the coastal highway in early October and cut off any Houthi fighters left on the island from overland resupply.

C. A Divided Anti-Houthi Camp

Raw numbers exaggerate the apparent strength of forces opposed to the Houthis. While official figures suggest the anti-Houthi camp outnumbers the group by up to 200,000 fighters, these numbers mask the fragmented nature of their coalition. The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen reported that Houthi forces grew from 220,000 fighters in 2022 to roughly 350,000 by mid-2024 after a mass recruitment drive.[110] In contrast, the regular Yemeni Armed Forces that are part of Yemen's internationally recognized government report 300,000 to 400,000 personnel under the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), alongside at least four other major paramilitary and militia formations: the Emirati-backed Southern Giants Brigades (20,000–70,000 fighters), the Saudi-backed National Shield Forces (30,000–45,000), the Yemeni Emergency Forces (20,000–35,000), and Tareq Saleh's National Resistance Forces on the Red Sea coast.[111]

Internal command fragmentation and differing ideologies also undermine the anti-Houthi coalition's capacity to match Houthi strength. The Houthis operate a centralized structure, with a single leadership and defense ministry directing regional commands and all branches of their forces. In contrast, their opponents are split among formations with separate commanders, patrons, and agendas. The Yemeni Emergency Forces formally fall under the PLC president but operate outside the defense ministry under a Saudi commander. The PLC created the National Shield Forces in 2023 partly to counterbalance southern separatists.[112] The Southern Giants Brigades, drawn largely from southern Yemen, pair Salafist hostility to the Houthis with a separatist goal of an independent south.[113] Their leaders treat the war as a defense of southern territory against Houthi expansion and believe they have little reason to spend their fighters restoring a unified Yemeni government in Sanaa. They fought hardest when the Houthis pushed south, as in Shabwa in early 2022, and have shown far less appetite for campaigns in Houthi-held northern highlands.[114]

Anti-Houthi forces also trail the group in firepower and, as mentioned, are almost entirely reliant on foreign backers for weapons and training. The Yemeni Armed Forces fields mostly aging Soviet and Russian equipment, and the Southern Giants drew much of their armor and guided missiles from the U.A.E., whose withdrawal from Yemen leaves that supply line uncertain, while the Houthis field indigenously produced ballistic and cruise missiles; naval drones; and drones that can reach Israel and every Gulf state, an arsenal that, even when assembled domestically in Yemen, is reliant on Iranian designs, components, funding, and technical training that Tehran has provided the group for more than a decade.[115] Because each anti-Houthi formation answers first to its own backer, the Saudi-Emirati split weakened the forces Abu Dhabi had armed and trained. The result is a camp that can retake ground with Saudi airpower, as Operation Dawn of Yemen demonstrated in early October at Mocha, yet lacks

the unified command and heavy weaponry to push into the Houthi heartland, leaving any rollback of Houthi territory dependent on years of sustained outside support.

Key Fighting Groups in Yemen

Group	Leaders	Size	Capabilities	External Backer	Position in Government	Key Operational Areas
Houthis	Commander-in-Chief Abdulmalik al-Houthi; Chief of Staff Yusuf al-Madani	350,000 (as of 2024)	Ballistic Missiles; Cruise Missiles; Anti-Ship Missiles; Attack Drones	Iran	Rival Governing Authority to Presidential Leadership Council (PLC)	Northwest Yemen; Sanaa; Taiz; Hodeidah, Ibb, Dhamar, and Amran Governorates
Yemeni Armed Forces (IRG)	Commander in Chief/PLC Chairman Rashad al-Alimi; Chief of Staff Saghir Hamud Aziz	300,000-400,000	Arms; Ground Vehicles; Artillery	Saudi Arabia	Yemen's Official State Government	Northern Yemen; Marib and Taiz Governorates
National Resistance Forces (NRF)	Commander Tareq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh; Chief of Operations Abdulrahman Noman al-Samii	56,200-64,000	U.A.E.-Supplied Vehicles; Commercially Available ISR Drones	Saudi Arabia; Previously U.A.E.	Commander Serves in PLC	Hodeidah, Taiz, and Lahij Governorates
Southern Giants Brigades (SGB)	Abdulrahman al-Mahrami	20,000-30,000; Possibly 70,000	U.A.E.-Supplied Tanks; Guided Missiles; Artillery; Modern Armor	U.A.E.	Formal Government-Aligned Forces under PLC	Taiz, Lahij, and al-Dali Governorates
National Shield Forces (NSF)	Commander Brigadier General Bassam Mahdar al-Sanabi; Chief of Staff Abdulrahman Saleh al-Lahji	30,000-45,000	Chinese-Origin Tactical Drone Fleet; 122 mm Grad-Family MRL; Armored Vehicles; Machine Guns	Saudi Arabia	PLC Chairman's Reserve Force	Southern Yemen; Northern al-Jawf Governorate
Yemeni Emergency Forces (YEF)	Maj. Gen. Yasser Abdullah al-Maabari (First Division)	30,000-40,000	Combat Vehicles; Anti-Tank Weapons	Saudi Arabia	Under PLC Authority with Saudi Command	Yemen-Saudi Arabia Border; Parts of al-Jawf and Marib Governorates

D. Two Continents, One Threat

The Houthis' expansion onto the African shore of the Red Sea risks putting part of the group's threat beyond the reach of any campaign confined to Yemen. Since the early 2020s, the group has extended to Africa, primarily on the Horn of Africa, by building smuggling networks, cultivating armed partners, and seeking logistics and surveillance nodes on the African shore. Its most notable partnership in Africa, that

with al-Shabaab, has deepened considerably since early 2025 as the Somalia-based al-Qaeda affiliate trades Houthi arms and training for funding and less traceable trafficking routes. The Houthis have also enlisted al-Shabaab's help in placing communications and surveillance equipment within Somali territory in order to extend the reach of their missiles and drones.[116] Both groups are U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, and al-Shabaab has plotted attacks against the U.S. homeland, so Houthi weapons and training that expand its capabilities create a threat that reaches beyond the Red Sea.[117] Piracy is also resurging in the Gulf of Aden—at least 23 pirate attacks have occurred since April—possibly as a result of pirate groups using Houthi-supplied GPS devices to track commercial ships.[118]

The key trend among Houthi support for Africa-based groups is its maturation from opportunistic trafficking into more deliberate networks that empower the Iranian-backed group and will make it harder to combat. The group recruits African migrants transiting Yemen to serve as smugglers and is also building its own logistics hubs in Somaliland and Puntland, where storing Iranian cargo ashore, instead of on dhows in the Red Sea, would allow the group to stagger shipments and evade naval patrols.[119] Djibouti, which hosts the only U.S. base near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, has become the group's most important staging point. According to a report from the Century Foundation, a Houthi cell has operated there since about 2022 and uses shell companies that receive containerized imports and break them down for dhow transport to Yemen. One dhow seized in 2025 with 750 tons of Iranian missiles, drone engines, and radar aboard had made roughly a dozen runs from Djibouti. Between 2023 and 2025, two Djibouti-based firms moved an estimated 7,500 to 8,500 tons of ammonium nitrate and other chemicals toward Houthi territory.[120]

Israel and the U.A.E. are already positioning themselves on the African shore, with Somaliland at the center, to counter the growing Houthi threat. The U.A.E. is the most deeply embedded Gulf actor in East Africa, with an estimated $47 billion in projects—accounting for roughly 60 percent of Gulf capital flowing into the region—and port agreements stretching from Djibouti to Somaliland.[121] A 2017 agreement gave Abu Dhabi the right to a military base and airfield at Berbera in Somaliland, where satellite imagery shows major airport expansion since late 2025, complete with an array of military equipment from radar systems to multirole helicopters.[122] Israel recognized Somaliland in December 2025 and has since trained Somaliland security officials and surveyed its coast for a possible installation roughly 100 kilometers west of Berbera, from which it could collect intelligence on and strike the Houthis 260 kilometers across the Gulf of Aden.[123] Those overlapping footholds make the African shore a ready extension of any counter-Houthi campaign. They also make it a likely target, since a Houthi presence in Somaliland could put Israeli, Emirati, or, potentially, American outposts there within reach.

Saudi Arabia's stake in East Africa follows a strategy that competes with the U.A.E.'s, which carries the Gulf rivalry from Yemen onto the African shore. Riyadh has concentrated its East African engagement in Djibouti, which holds $13 billion of its roughly $15.6 billion regional portfolio, led by a $12.7 billion refinery project, alongside a planned logistics hub and negotiations over a military base.[124] In January 2026, under Saudi pressure, Somalia cut commercial and security ties with the U.A.E., citing the Emirati company DP World's ports at Berbera and Bosaso.[125] From Washington's perspective, the African shore is a growing base for its partners best placed to prevent Houthi expansion, but one that is increasingly overshadowed by the rivalry most likely to undermine them.

E. Houthi Threat to Free Navigation

The Houthi campaign against Saudi Arabia threatens free navigation directly, since the kingdom has turned to the Red Sea for its oil exports as Iranian attacks cut traffic through Hormuz. The July blockade on Saudi ports already turned the group's fight with Riyadh into attacks on Red Sea shipping, and each new strike on Saudi oil infrastructure raises the odds of another round.[126] These attacks suggest the

group is determined to disrupt regional commerce in order to pressure nations into giving in to the Houthis' economic and territorial aspirations.[127] A growing share of regional oil now leaves through Yanbu and the Bab el-Mandeb, so sustained Houthi aggression could soon extend to targeting this shipping again.

By shifting from attacks on shipping to territorial conquest, the offensive put the Houthis in a stronger position to threaten control of the Bab el-Mandeb and imperil freedom of navigation. The Houthis' offensive in September provided the group with a direct view of vessels transiting the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, enabling them to target ships with shoulder-fired weapons or lay mines in the waterway if they choose to do so. As the Houthis focused on seizing territory in Yemen, the group decreased fire at shipping by 83 percent, from 18 projectiles in August to three in September, but the 716 projectiles it launched at vessels since October 2023 reflect a proven anti-ship capability it could reactivate.[128] Each stretch of coastline the Houthis seized brought their launchers closer to the shipping lanes and would let them strike vessels with less warning. Any Houthi force still on Perim sits on the shipping lane itself, so even a small, isolated garrison could threaten passing ships without support from the mainland coast.[129] Coupled with continuing Iranian support and access to advanced weaponry, the Houthis could have exploited these strategic positions to inflict significant damage intended to disrupt Red Sea shipping and create another chokepoint in the region.

Although Yemen's government retook Mocha and Dhubab in early October, costing the Houthis their closest vantage point on the strait, the Houthis, even before retaking Dhubab and other strategic points along the coast, have repeatedly shown they did not need this territory to disrupt shipping in the Red Sea. While the areas they briefly held between mid-September and early October provided them with control over the Bab el-Mandeb, the group kept the coastline it has used to attack ships since 2023. Between 2023 and 2025, the Houthis fired anti-ship ballistic missiles into the Red Sea from what U.S. Central Command described as "Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen"—areas the group held before its power grab along the Bab el-Mandeb in September 2026.[130] Devastating Houthi attacks, such as when the group sank two bulk carriers in July 2025, occurred off the coast of Hodeidah, which the Houthis have held since 2014.[131]

The larger danger lies in what the Houthis can build if they keep Hodeidah and expand their presence across the Horn of Africa. Hodeidah and the nearby ports of Salif and Ras Isa remain the group's main gateway for Iranian weapons and Chinese components arriving by sea, and one dhow seized in 2025 with 750 tons of Iranian missiles, drone engines, and radar aboard had made roughly a dozen runs from Djibouti to Salif.[132] The group's networks in Somaliland, Puntland, and Djibouti add staging points beyond the reach of any campaign confined to Yemen. As long as the Houthis continue to utilize those supply chains, the group can rebuild and enlarge its arsenal and choose the time and place of its next campaign against shipping. The United States should act now against both the group's existing capabilities and its capacity to expand them. While the Red Sea holds international attention, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United Kingdom are already committing forces, and Israel and the U.A.E. are building footholds in Somaliland. That convergence gives Washington an opening to lead partners already inclined to act, and it will narrow if the United States waits for the next crisis.

V. Why the Houthi Threat Endures

Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States have each struck the Houthis hard, yet the group has rebuilt after every campaign. Those adversaries fought on separate timelines, left supply lines intact, and split responsibility for the Bab el-Mandeb across coalitions and commands. The anti-Houthi camp has kept many of those divisions, while the Iran war and competing U.S. priorities have stretched the forces available to address them. A new campaign that repeats that pattern would likely leave the Houthis free to rebuild once more.

A. Lessons Learned

Prior campaigns against the Houthis imposed high costs on the group, yet none removed the arsenal, supply lines, or coastal access that let it return to attacking shipping. Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Israel each fought the group for separate aims on separate timelines, which let the Houthis absorb pressure from one adversary while rearming or attacking another. That fragmentation across partners, maritime coalitions, and U.S. commands has helped sustain the Houthi threat to free navigation. The failure to act on the Houthis has been bipartisan, as, from the Obama administration's support for the Saudi-led intervention in 2015 through the first Trump and Biden administrations, Washington treated the Houthis as a secondary problem and sought to contain each round of Houthi attacks without removing the capabilities that made the next round possible.

i. Uncoordinated Campaigns Let the Houthis Divide Their Adversaries

Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States each dealt with the Houthis on their own terms, which let the group divide them and choose whom to fight. The May 2025 ceasefire that ended Operation Rough Rider protected only American vessels, and the Houthis kept attacking Israel and other ships in the Red Sea. Israel's strikes targeted the threat to Israeli territory alone. The 2022 truce spared Saudi Arabia from cross-border attacks, which left the group free to rearm in the territory it held in northwestern Yemen. Since shipping companies weigh risk across the entire waterway, an arrangement that protects one country's ships does little to bring commercial traffic back. Fragmentation has also run through the anti-Houthi camp inside Yemen, where the PLC—Yemen's internationally recognized government—and the STC pursued competing agendas, and the Saudi-Emirati split that ended with the U.A.E.'s withdrawal from Yemen in early 2026 removed one of the most capable forces from the fight.

ii. Leaving Supply Networks Intact Let the Houthis Rebuild

Military pressure that left supply networks intact gave the Houthis time to replace the equipment and supplies they have lost. The Saudi-led air campaign drove the group to develop long-range strike weapons with Iranian help, and later U.S. and Israeli strikes destroyed launchers, ports, and senior leaders without stopping the flow of components that let the Houthis rebuild. Since the supply networks have run along several air, land, and sea routes at once, pressure on any single route has not cut off the flow, widening the area that any interdiction effort has to cover.

iii. Fragmented Maritime Coalitions Left Gaps in Coverage

The development of maritime coalitions around Yemen has divided responsibility for the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb so widely that no single authority answers for its security. Task forces built to counter Somali piracy and newer missions launched against the Houthis operate under separate mandates and authorities, and each tends to defend its own members' ships and priorities. Those gaps likely help

Iranian smuggling continue and let the Houthis select targets that fall outside any one coalition's protection.

iv. The CENTCOM-AFRICOM Seam Divided U.S. Attention

The U.S. military presence around the Bab el-Mandeb is geographically well positioned but operationally fragmented because the strait sits on the seam between two U.S. combatant commands in one of the region's most dangerous waterways. Each command treats the strait as the outer edge of its responsibilities, and neither treats the Houthis as its top security threat, which leaves a gap the group can exploit. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which led previous Red Sea operations, remains concentrated on operations against Iran and securing the Strait of Hormuz.[133] Meanwhile, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) stations its forces in Djibouti on the East African coast, directly across from Houthi-controlled Yemen, but the United States established its posture in Africa primarily for land-based counterterrorism operations against al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Somalia, not to protect shipping.

v. Reliance on a Single Host Constrained U.S. Operations

Washington has also depended on a single host government for access near the Bab el-Mandeb, which has left the United States with few options to monitor and strike the Houthis from the African side of the strait. U.S. forces on the African shore operate almost entirely from Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, whose government has barred them from striking Houthi positions and can restrict other operations from its territory, even as Houthi cells have used Djibouti as a staging point for smuggled cargo.

B. Ongoing Challenges

The Houthis have repeatedly withstood sustained U.S. pressure, which has in turn exposed the limits of available forces, munitions, and political attention. These continuing constraints have consistently undermined previous campaigns and allowed the threat the Houthis pose to Gulf states, Israel, and international shipping to grow for over a decade.

i. The Houthis' Asymmetric Advantage

The Houthis leverage cost-effective drones and missiles to impose disproportionate costs on defenders and disrupt international shipping. Because their munitions are far cheaper than the interceptors required to stop them, the group forces its adversaries to bear the burden of constant defense. Local production using Iranian designs and Chinese components enables the Houthis to quickly replenish losses, thereby outpacing the effects of external strikes. Over more than a decade, Houthi fighters have maintained control of northern Yemen and the port of Hodeidah, resisting a Saudi-led coalition and local fighters who are reluctant to advance north and are backed by states increasingly at odds with one another.

ii. Limited U.S. Resources

The United States confronts significant resource restrictions in sustaining a campaign against the Houthis. Most U.S. forces in the region—50,000 service members, two aircraft carriers, eight guided-missile destroyers, and an amphibious assault ship in the Arabian Sea—prioritize operations in Iran and guaranteeing the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, leaving only two destroyers in the Red Sea theater. Months of intercepting Iranian missiles and drones have depleted munitions vital to Indo-Pacific readiness, while naval vessels and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets are

already heavily burdened by competing operational demands. U.S. political attention mirrors these priorities as the focus on Iran, from Capitol Hill to the White House, has relegated the Houthis to a secondary concern, especially since the Houthis' most recent operations have selectively targeted Saudi Arabia and Saudi-linked shipping, rather than wantonly firing on all international shipping.

iii. American Fatigue with the Middle East

Fatigue with the region as a whole compounds those operational and political limits. CENTCOM has run near-continuous combat operations for a quarter century, from Iraq and Afghanistan to the campaign against the Islamic State and now Iran, and its forces and staff are stretched across simultaneous missions. Many policymakers and much of the public have grown to increasingly question further U.S. commitments in the Middle East and argue that Asia deserves priority, which weakens support for a long campaign in Yemen. The Houthis have exploited such fatigue before, timing ceasefires and escalations to split their adversaries and outlast their attention.

iv. No Yemeni Alternative on the Ground

As long as the Houthis control Sanaa, Hodeidah, and most of Yemen's population—an estimated 70 to 80 percent of the Yemeni population is under Houthi control— no amount of air and naval power can end the threat they pose.[134] Every internationally-led campaign since 2015, whether Saudi, Emirati, American, or Israeli, has destroyed a varying degree of Houthi equipment and leadership without actually dislodging the Houthis from the ground they hold. The Yemeni forces that could potentially replace Houthi control currently lack the capacity to do so, as the anti-Houthi coalition is fragmented into multiple formations with distinct commanders and external patrons, has less firepower than the Houthis, and has shown limited willingness to operate in the northern highlands. The government these forces nominally serve is even less capable of effective governance. The PLC remains weakened by internal divisions and rampant corruption. A Houthi drone strike on the PLC-controlled oil terminals halted petroleum exports, leading the government to rely on an even greater share of Saudi and Emirati financial support. Even with this support, the government struggles to pay its public sector employees, from teachers to the military.[135] A government unable to provide basic services or security offers Yemenis who live under Houthi control little incentive to back the internationally recognized government. Without a credible Yemeni-led alternative able to take and hold ground, and more importantly, govern that ground, outside pressure can, at best, contain the Houthis.

VI. Countering the Houthi Threat

Defending essential U.S. interests in the Red Sea requires protecting shipping, degrading the Houthis' strike capabilities, and defending targeted U.S. partners. It is critical that the United States act to support these interests, but that does not mean it needs to act alone, or even shoulder most of the burden. Many regional and European partners are already acting against the Houthis and have the most at stake for their infrastructure and economies. Washington should harness this willingness by coordinating a regional coalition with a long-term strategy, delegating most operations, spearheading efforts to block rearmament, and expanding U.S. access on the African shore. That strategy must also be tied to U.S. policy toward Iran, since the Houthis would be Iran's most likely partner to open a second front—which Tehran has threatened before—if the war resumes, and any settlement with Tehran will shape the group's future access to weapons and money.[136]

Washington must unify its partners around shared objectives and end states for countering the Houthis, correcting the fragmented campaigns of the past that allowed the group to exploit divisions among its adversaries. This strategy should marshal the full range of U.S. power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools, backed by intelligence—in a coordinated effort. First, preserving freedom of navigation requires restoring commercial traffic through the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb to pre-October 2023 levels, with reduced war-risk premiums and fewer diversions around Africa as the Houthi threat recedes. Second, degrading and denying Houthi strike capabilities demands the destruction of launchers, production sites, and stockpiles faster than the group can replace them and the severing of supply lines that enable rearmament, so the Houthis lose the capacity to sustain missile, drone, and anti-ship campaigns against shipping or neighboring states. Third, supporting the defense of regional partners means ensuring Saudi Arabia, Israel, and others can protect their cities, energy infrastructure, and forces against residual Houthi attacks through integrated air and missile defenses and shared early warning—reducing reliance on U.S. assets. Over the longer term, the strategy must maintain sustained pressure to roll back Houthi territorial control by uniting the various military factions on the ground and working with Yemen's internationally recognized government and building its capacity to exert authority over the country's territory and coastline.

A. Build Coalitions to Degrade, Defend, and Deny Houthi Aggression

Washington should build and coordinate linked coalitions against the Houthis, each with its own mission and membership. Partners have accepted different levels of risk against the group. The European Union's Aspides mission, for example, has escorted ships and shot down Houthi drones under a mandate that excludes strikes in Yemen. A single coalition built around offensive strikes would lose partners of that kind. The Pentagon should link efforts aimed at degrading, defending, and denying Houthi aggression through shared intelligence and synchronized planning. The State and Treasury Departments should lead the diplomatic and financial work each coalition requires.

i. Cooperation to Degrade Houthi Capabilities

Only a unified regional coalition can sustain pressure on the Houthis and prevent them from exploiting divisions among their opponents. The United States should organize and coordinate this coalition, uniting partners behind a long-term strategy to degrade the Houthis' arsenal while maintaining pressure on the group inside Yemen. Even if Washington chooses to strike the Houthis, those strikes will be far more effective within a coalition capable of sustaining pressure while U.S. attention remains focused on Iran.

Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the U.A.E. should anchor this offensive coalition. Riyadh is already assembling partners against the Houthis and contributes proximity, airpower, and active forces, so Washington should reinforce that effort to share the burden and limit demands on U.S. forces. Israel offers unmatched experience targeting Houthi leaders and infrastructure, while other partners can add surveillance, refueling, air defense, or maritime patrol capabilities. The U.A.E. maintains ties with Yemeni forces and brings significant air and maritime capabilities.

Bringing the U.A.E. back into the fight and within the coalition remains crucial. Abu Dhabi offers intelligence on the Houthis, military capabilities few partners can match, and one of the Arab world's closest relationships with Israel, which would make it a natural link between Israel and Arab partners. Emirati leaders stayed out of the 2024 air defense effort of Israel partly because they protested the U.S. response to the Houthis' 2022 attacks on Abu Dhabi, which they viewed as inadequate.[137] U.S.-Emirati relations have since improved, but Saudi-Emirati friction over Yemen now poses the larger obstacle to bringing the U.A.E. into the fold. A U.S.-convened coalition gives Washington a forum to ease that rift, which is showing preliminary signs of mending, before it can fracture any coordinated regional response.[138]

The Department of Defense (DoD) is the natural convener, since American forces hold working relationships with Israel and every regional Arab partner, and much of the coordination can stay out of public view, which political sensitivities require. The coalition against the Islamic State offers a model for organizing the effort over time. Through Operation Inherent Resolve, the United States led a coalition that grew to more than 70 members, with separate working groups on counter-finance, foreign fighters, communications, and stabilization, while U.S.-trained local forces held ground and most members contributed without joining the military campaign.[139] A comparable structure against the Houthis would let partners contribute according to their capabilities and political limits, keep U.S. forces in an enabling role, and give the effort the staying power that past campaigns lacked.

ii. Jointly Defending Partners Against Houthi Attacks

Building on recent efforts from partners like the United Kingdom to help Saudi Arabia defend itself from Houthi attacks, Washington should help organize a regional coalition to defend states against Houthi missile and drone attacks, with membership open to partners that will not strike Yemen. In addition to deploying air defense or aerial refueling assets, the coalition could expand shared warning, integrated air defense, and coordinated interception. Stronger defenses would deny the Houthis the leverage each successful strike on a Saudi oil facility or Israeli city provides. They would also let partners withstand Houthi retaliation for joining the strike and interdiction efforts.

DoD has shown it can organize regional partners under fire. During Iran's April and October 2024 missile and drone attacks on Israel, it assembled an ad hoc coalition of Israel, Arab states without formal relations with Israel, and European partners, fused their radar and sensor data, coordinated aircraft across multiple national airspaces, and ran the defense through CENTCOM's Combined Air Operations Center at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.[140] That integrated air and missile defense model offers a template for the Red Sea, where partners need to share information, divide responsibilities, and operate from a common picture without publicly joining a formal alliance.

The Pentagon should institutionalize that model around the Bab el-Mandeb, dividing responsibilities according to what each partner does best. The first priority should be agreements on intelligence and sensor sharing, airspace access, the division of strike and defensive responsibilities, and crisis procedures, settled before the next round of attacks forces partners to improvise.

Gulf partners already field the advanced U.S. systems such a coalition would connect, which lowers the cost of building it. An Emirati-operated Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery intercepted a Houthi ballistic missile aimed at an oil facility near Al Dhafra Air Base in January 2022, the system's first combat use.[141] Saudi Arabia activated its own THAAD battery in July 2025.[142] Saudi crews have also fired U.S.-made Patriot interceptors at Houthi ballistic missiles since 2015. Washington approved the sale of 300 more Patriot interceptors to the kingdom in August 2022.[143] The Pentagon should push regional partners to connect radar data into a shared early-warning network so that a launch detected by one state alerts every state along the missile's path. Washington should also accelerate sales and co-production of lower-cost interceptors, counter-drone systems, and directed-energy weapons for partners, which would let them defend against Houthi drones without drawing on U.S. inventories.

iii. Multinational Efforts to Block Foreign Weapons Transfers

Blocking the flow of foreign weapons and dual-use components to the Houthis is essential to limiting their military capabilities. Alongside the regional counter-Houthi coalition, Washington should lead a separate interagency and multinational effort, involving DoD, State, and Treasury, to disrupt these supply lines from Iran, China, and other sources. Recognizing that nations differ in their willingness to engage directly in Yemen, this interdiction coalition should operate under a distinct mandate and rules of engagement, prioritizing the identification and disruption of supply routes and logistics networks.

The multinational effort should work to identify the dhows, commercial vessels, ports, flight paths, and overland routes tied to Houthi procurement. In tandem, partner navies should step up inspections and seizures, and partner governments should coordinate prosecutions and sanctions against the companies and facilitators involved. Washington should also work with partners to disrupt Iranian intelligence and targeting support. The effort should extend its scrutiny to cargo leaving Chinese ports, and Washington should press Beijing to enforce the UN arms embargo it claims to respect against the firms that ship missile components to Yemen. Any settlement with Tehran should include enforceable limits on Iranian funding, arming, and technical support to the Houthis.

Diplomatic, informational, and economic tools should carry as much of this effort as naval patrols. Washington should press the states along the smuggling routes to help close them, starting with Oman, which mediated the May 2025 U.S.-Houthi ceasefire and borders Yemen's Mahra governate, a long-standing route for smuggling weapons to the group.[144] Muscat's channel to the Houthis gives Washington a diplomatic outlet, and tighter Omani border controls would close an overland route that interdiction at sea cannot reach. Djibouti, whose ports Houthi front companies use to break down containerized cargo for dhow transport, should face pressure to inspect shipments bound for Yemen. Egypt, which lost more than $6 billion in Suez Canal revenue in 2024 as ships avoided the Red Sea, has every reason to contribute naval patrols and intelligence.[145] The State and Treasury Departments should also expand sanctions on the shipping companies, vessels, brokers, and insurers that move Houthi cargo, work with flag states to deregister ships tied to the trade, and press for UN Security Council action that tightens the arms embargo and its inspection regime. Washington should also publicize interdicted Iranian and Chinese shipments, much in the same way it has publicized interdicted vessels during the Iran war, to expose violations of the arms embargo and raise the political cost of supplying the group.[146]

B. Establish a Counter-Houthi Threat Finance Cell

Disrupting the financial networks that support the Houthis is vital to degrading their operational capacity. The United States should establish a dedicated threat finance cell targeting the money behind Houthi weapons procurement and activities. A successful model would be what the United States used in Afghanistan, where a cell led by the Drug Enforcement Administration, with Treasury as co-deputy, embedded analysts with military commands to identify and disrupt the financial networks of the Taliban, terrorist groups, and narcotics traffickers.[147] For the Houthis, this cell should combine defense, intelligence, Treasury, and law enforcement expertise to map and disrupt the group's financial facilitators and revenue streams. Because the Trump administration redesignated the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, the cell can leverage the full range of U.S. counterterrorism finance authorities and provide partners with actionable targets.

C. Expand Access and Coordination on the African Shore

Washington should supplement—not replace—its position in Djibouti with distributed access elsewhere in the region, preferably along the Gulf of Aden. U.S. basing near the Bab el-Mandeb rests entirely on Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, where the Djiboutian government has barred strikes on Houthi positions and could restrict other operations, such as ISR flights.[148] That gives a single host government a veto over U.S. operations at a waterway central to American and global economic interests.

The two most logical positions would be Berbera in Somaliland, which has offered the United States access to a deep-water port and one of Africa's longest runways, and Bosaso in Puntland, where Washington has recently agreed to expand a base.[149] Berbera could serve as a hub for maritime patrol aircraft, refueling, and counter-drone and radar systems in a stable part of the region free from the political constraints existing in Djibouti. A distributed network would give AFRICOM the chance to play a more direct role at a chokepoint the United States has traditionally treated as a Middle East responsibility.

Expanded access should come with a single U.S. command structure for the strait. The Pentagon should establish a standing joint task force spanning the two combatant commands that meet at the Bab el-Mandeb, under one commander, to maintain a common maritime picture across both shores, coordinate surveillance, air and missile defense, and mine countermeasures, and feed data to coalition and interdiction partners. Its first priority should be persistent radar and drone coverage of the Yemeni coast and the Horn of Africa, since Houthi launch sites sit close enough to the shipping lanes to leave ships little warning, and its mandate should extend to the Houthi and al-Shabaab networks that sustain threats at sea.

D. Build a Credible Yemeni Alternative to the Houthis

In the long term, Washington—working closely with Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.—must ensure the unity of the current patchwork of opposition forces operating in Yemen and support a credible alternative to Houthi-led government. While the United States and the coalition it builds can strike key Houthi targets and go after its financial networks, only united Yemeni forces supported by an effective government can seize and maintain control of current Houthi-held territory. Constructing that alternative will require a phased approach by addressing divisions among the anti-Houthi factions currently on the ground in Yemen and strengthening good governance in existing government-held territory before supporting a broader campaign to reclaim the highly populated territory in Houthi strongholds.

i. Unify Anti-Houthi Forces Under a Single Command

On-the-ground operations in Yemen should run through a unified command structure under the internationally recognized PLC, and Washington should encourage Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to integrate the medley of groups they back—the Southern Giants Brigades, National Shield Forces, Yemeni Emergency Forces, and National Resistance Forces—into a cohesive unit. However, integration will require more than a coordinated operational framework, especially given the competing political ambitions of the various factions, primarily among the southern groups seeking greater autonomy or independence. Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have the best relationships with the groups' leadership and can negotiate arrangements that accommodate differing political objectives and can incentivize organization integration by providing linked pay, ensuring rank reciprocity for officers, overseeing promotions, and delivering weapons. U.S. advisers, collaborating with Saudi and Emirati counterparts using the by-with-through model previously employed against the Islamic State's territorial caliphate, should assist in training and equipping units for offensive operations.

ii. Strengthen Governance in Government-Held Territory

Alongside military integration, the United States must help support effective governance in territory already held by the PLC so that it can demonstrate its ability to provide a credible alternative to Houthi rule. Given the weaknesses in the PLC's governance capabilities, beginning first and foremost with its ability to finance public expenditures, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., and other Gulf donors should ensure the payments for civil servants through transparent mechanisms designed to reduce corruption, as lowering corruption can help lead to better governance outcomes.[150] To help wean PLC reliance on foreign funding, the United States and Gulf partners should facilitate the restoration of government oil exports, which have been suspended since Houthi drone strikes on southern terminals in late 2022, by providing air defenses to protect these terminals from further attacks. Supplying consistent pay, electricity, and basic services in government-controlled areas will undermine Houthi influence as effectively as military advances.

VII. Conclusion

The Houthis have shown that a single hostile non-state actor can threaten one of the world's principal maritime chokepoints—a situation the United States cannot afford to accept around the Bab el-Mandeb. Successive Democratic and Republican administrations, beginning with the Obama administration, have treated the group as a secondary concern. As a result, campaigns with divergent objectives allowed a Yemeni insurgency to evolve into a force capable of striking Riyadh, reaching Tel Aviv, and operating on both shores of the Bab el-Mandeb. Given that Houthi attacks impact multiple countries simultaneously, they present a unique opportunity for the United States to build a durable coalition. The group has also shown responsiveness to sustained pressure, as evidenced by Operation Rough Rider's 52-day campaign, which brought it to the negotiating table in 2025. A U.S. strategy that coordinates partners to protect shipping, degrade Houthi strike capabilities, defend regional states, and disrupt the flow of weapons and finances that enable the group to rearm can turn this opportunity into sustained pressure. Maintaining coalition unity will be as critical as any individual operation, since the Houthis have endured for two decades by dividing their adversaries.

Endnotes

1 Spencer Kimball, "Tankers Defy Sharp Escalation of Iranian Attacks to Keep Crude Oil Flowing Through Strait of Hormuz," *CNBC*, October 30, 2026, https://www.cnbc.com/2026/10/30/tanker-attack-strait-hormuz-iran-war-oil.html.
2 Matt Spetalnick and Andrea Shalal, "One Week Into Iran War, the Dangers for the US and Trump Multiply," Reuters, March 7, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/one-week-into-iran-war-dangers-us-trump-multiply-2026-03-07/.
3 "Shipping Data: UNCTAD Releases New Seaborne Trade Statistics," UN Trade and Development, April 23, 2025, https://unctad.org/news/shipping-data-unctad-releases-new-seaborne-trade-statistics; "World Oil Transit Chokepoints," U.S. Energy Information Administration, March 3, 2026, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/special-topics/world_oil_transit_Chokepoints.
4 George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 97–100.
5 The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2025), p. 5, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf.
6 Woodrow Wilson, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress on the Conditions of Peace," The American Presidency Project, January 8, 1918, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-joint-session-congress-the-conditions-peace-the-fourteen-points; "Joint Statement by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill," August 14, 1941, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1941* [hereafter *FRUS*], vol. 1, *General, the Soviet Union*, ed. Matilda F. Axton et al. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958), doc. 372, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d372.
7 "Conversation Between President Nixon and His Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)," May 29, 1971, in *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-1, *Documents on Global Issues, 1969–1972*, ed. Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), doc. 395, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/d395.
8 Limits in the Seas, No. 112, *United States Responses to Excessive National Maritime Claims*, U.S. Department of State, March 9, 1992, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/LIS-112.pdf; *Annual Freedom of Navigation Report, Fiscal Year 2018*, U.S. Department of Defense, https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/FY18%20DoD%20Annual%20FON%20Report%20(final).pdf.
9 Zeljko Bogetic, Luan Zhao, Eric Le Borgne, and Holly Krambeck, "Navigating Troubled Waters: The Red Sea Shipping Crisis and Its Global Repercussions," World Bank Blogs, May 16, 2024, https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/navigating-troubled-waters--the-red-sea-shipping-crisis-and-its-; Andres B. Schwarzenberg, *Red Sea Shipping Disruptions: Estimating Economic Effects*, Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2024, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12657; "Iranian Allies Captured a Strategic Red Sea Island in a Vital Waterway. Here's What to Know," *CNN*, September 11, 2026, https://www.cnn.com/2026/09/10/middleeast/houthis-capture-mocha-red-sea-strait-intl; David Brennan, "Houthis' Yemen Gains Put Control of Strategic Strait, Key Cities in Focus," *ABC News*, September 16, 2026, https://abcnews.com/International/houthis-yemen-gains-put-control-strategic-strait-key/story?id=136485092; Johannes Lumma and Jasper Verschuur, "Yemen's Houthis Move to Control Crucial Waterway – Our Research Maps the Countries Most at Risk," *The Conversation*, September 28, 2026, https://theconversation.com/yemens-houthis-move-to-control-crucial-waterway-our-research-maps-the-countries-most-at-risk-292317.
10 Josh Myers, "The Suez Canal in Numbers," World Economic Forum, May 25, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/stories/trade-and-investment/the-suez-canal-in-numbers/; "Why Bab Al-Mandeb Matters as Houthis Enter the Iran War," *Arab News*, March 31, 2026, https://www.arabnews.com/middle-east/why-bab-al-mandeb-matters-as-houthis-enter-the-iran-war-2638262.
11 International Transport Forum, *The Red Sea Crisis: Impacts on Global Shipping and the Case for International Co-Operation*, Background Paper (2024), p. 16, https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/repositories/red-sea-crisis-impacts-global-shipping.pdf; James Baker, "Box Freight Rates Rise Again as Diversions Resume," *Lloyd's List*, January 5, 2024, https://www.lloydslist.com/LL1147832/Box-freight-rates-rise-again-as-diversions-resume; Charlie Bartlett, "Attacks Drive up Red Sea War-Risk Insurance Premiums 900%," *The Loadstar*, February 27, 2024, https://theloadstar.com/attacks-drive-up-red-sea-war-risk-insurance-premiums-900/.

12 "Bab el-Mandeb Strait," International Monetary Fund Port Watch, https://portwatch.imf.org/pages/6b1814d64903461b98144a6cc25eb79c.
13 David Hummels and Georg Schaur, "Time as a Trade Barrier," NBER Working Paper 17758 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, January 2012), p. 5, https://www.nber.org/papers/w17758.
14 Parisa Kamali, Robin Koepke, Alessandra Sozzi, and Jasper Verschuur, "Red Sea Attacks Disrupt Global Trade," IMF Blog, March 7, 2024, https://www.imf.org/en/blogs/articles/2024/03/07/red-sea-attacks-disrupt-global-trade; Francois Vreÿ and Mark Blaine, "Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean Attacks Expose Africa's Maritime Vulnerability," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, April 9, 2024, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/red-sea-indian-ocean-attacks-africa-maritime-vulnerability/; "Red Sea War Risk Premiums Surge as Houthi Attacks Intensify: What Shippers Need to Know," *Insurtech Gulf*, March 26, 2026, https://www.insurtechgulf.com/blog/red-sea-war-risk-premiums-houthi-attacks-march-2026; "Prime Minister attends the Suez Canal Authority's 'Day of Excellence' Celebration," State Information Service, April 16, 2025, https://sis.gov.eg/en/media-center/events/prime-minister-attends-the-suez-canal-authority-s-day-of-excellence-celebration/.
15 "Strait of Hormuz Fact Sheet," International Energy Agency, February 2026, https://www.iea.org/about/oil-security-and-emergency-response/strait-of-hormuz.
16 Robert Rapier, "The Oil Market's Backup Plan Is Breaking Down," OilPrice.com, September 18, 2026, https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/The-Oil-Markets-Backup-Plan-Is-Breaking-Down.html.
17 Jonah Brody, *The Houthis Close in on the Gulf's Oil Export Lifeline*, JINSA, September 17, 2026, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/the-houthis-close-in-on-the-gulfs-oil-export-lifeline/.
18 "Yanbu Port Secures 4 Million Barrels of Oil Per Day for Global Markets," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, March 25, 2026, https://english.aawsat.com/business/5255035-yanbu-port-secures-4-million-barrels-oil-day-global-markets.
19 Energy Institute, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, 75th ed. (2026), https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review.
20 "Hormuz Crisis Throws Spotlight on World's Largest 'Chokepoint' - The Malacca Strait," Reuters, April 23, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hormuz-crisis-throws-spotlight-worlds-largest-chokepoint-malacca-strait-2026-04-23/; Stefanno Sulaiman, "Indonesia Reaffirms It Has No Plan to Impose Tolls in Malacca Strait," Reuters, April 24, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-reaffirms-it-has-no-plan-impose-tolls-malacca-strait-2026-04-24/; Michelle Brouhard and Baptiste Colomagro, "When Freedom of Navigation Collides with China Policy," *Politico*, July 13, 2026, https://www.politico.com/sponsor-content/2026/07/13/when-freedom-of-navigation-collides-with-china-policy.
21 "The Evolving World and the Right Way to China-US Coexistence," China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, May 13, 2026, http://www.cicir.ac.cn/NEW/en-us/Reports.html?id=27c51c1a-d49f-46e8-a3fd-80028c33d06f.
22 "Coast Guard Monitors Chinese Vessels in the Arctic," U.S. Department of Defense, July 20, 2026, https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4550235/coast-guard-monitors-chinese-vessels-in-the-arctic/; Gwladys Fouche, "US Watching Chinese Marine Presence off Alaska, Arctic Coast Guard Chief Says," Reuters, September 21, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/us-watching-chinese-marine-presence-off-alaska-arctic-coast-guard-chief-says-2026-09-21/.
23 Ari Cicurel and Sarah Havdala, *Preventing Iran's Weaponization of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait*, JINSA, July 29, 2026, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/preventing-irans-weaponization-of-the-bab-el-mandeb-strait/.
24 Quentin Zimmer, "The Tanker War," *Naval History*, U.S. Naval Institute, June 2025, https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history/2025/june/tanker-war.
25 Micah Zenko, "Obama's War of Choice: Supporting the Saudi-led Air War in Yemen," Council on Foreign Relations, September 25, 2015, https://www.cfr.org/articles/obamas-war-choice-supporting-saudi-led-air-war-yemen.
26 Michael R. Pompeo, "Terrorist Designation of Ansarallah in Yemen," U.S. Department of State, January 10, 2021, https://2017-2021.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-ansarallah-in-yemen/index.html.
27 Antony J. Blinken, "Revocation of the Terrorist Designation of Ansarallah," U.S. Department of State, February 12, 2021, https://2021-2025.state.gov/revocation-of-the-terrorist-designations-of-ansarallah/.
28 "President Trump's Clear and Unchanging Objectives Drive Decisive Success Against Iranian Regime," The White House, April 1, 2026, https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/04/president-trumps-clear-and-unchanging-objectives-drive-decisive-success-against-iranian-regime/.

29 Altaf Moti, "What the Yemen War Has Revealed About the Houthis' Weapon Supply," *The Arab Weekly*, September 24, 2026, https://thearabweekly.com/what-yemen-war-has-revealed-about-houthis-weapon-supply.
30 Mehdi Khalaji, "Yemen's Zaidis: A Window for Iranian Influence," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2, 2015, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/yemens-zaidis-window-iranian-influence.
31 Trevor Johnston et al., *Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah? Iranian Proxy Development in Yemen and the Future of the Houthi Movement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), p. 7.
32 Michael Knights, "The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 8 (September 2018), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/houthi-war-machine-guerrilla-war-state-capture/; Michael Knights, Adnan al-Gabarni, and Casey Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council: Command and Control in 'the Other Hezbollah'," *CTC Sentinel* 15, no. 10 (October 2022): https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-houthi-jihad-council-command-and-control-in-the-other-hezbollah/.
33 Barak Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), p. 1.
34 Knights, al-Gabarni, and Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council."
35 Central Intelligence Agency, *Iran: Exporting the Revolution* (Document No. CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100001-8, March 10, 1980), CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100001-8.pdf.
36 Knights, al-Gabarni, and Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council."
37 Johnston et al., *Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah?,* p. 54.
38 Knights, al-Gabarni, and Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council."
39 Sam Jones, Erika Solomon, and Najmeh Bozorgmehr, "Iran's Mahan Airline Defies Sanctions in Shadowy Aircraft Deal," *Financial Times*, May 11, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/b84920ce-f7d1-11e4-9beb-00144feab7de?syn-25a6b1a6=1.
40 Knights, "The Houthi War Machine."
41 Nadwa al-Dawsari, "The Ideological Underpinnings of the Houthis' Red Sea Attacks," Middle East Institute, January 22, 2024, https://mei.edu/publication/ideological-underpinnings-houthis-red-sea-attacks/.
42 Nadwa al-Dawsari, "The Houthis and the Limits of Diplomacy in Yemen," Middle East Institute, May 6, 2021, https://mei.edu/publication/houthis-and-limits-diplomacy-yemen/.
43 X post archived from the original at Revolutionary Media Center, "Why do you see yourself as having the legitimacy to move about the whole world and change its systems and cultures according to your whims and what suits your interests?," Telegram, January 3, 2024, https://t.me/s/YEMEN_RMC_21?q=1742619940056657985.
44 "Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh Cedes Power," *BBC*, February 27, 2012, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17177720; "How Yemen's Capital Sanaa Was Seized by Houthi Rebels," *BBC*, September 27, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-29380668; "Yemen's Houthi Rebels Announce Alliance with Ousted President," *Fox News*, July 28, 2016, https://www.foxnews.com/world/yemens-houthi-rebels-announce-alliance-with-ousted-president.
45 Knights, "The Houthi War Machine."
46 Knights, al-Gabarni, and Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council."
47 "Yemen Rebel Chief Vows to 'Never Give In'," Deutsche Welle, April 20, 2015, https://www.dw.com/en/yemens-houthi-leader-vows-to-never-give-in-to-saudi-aggression/a-18393051.
48 Ken Dilanian and Courtney Kube, "Houthi Rebels Fired Missile at Riyadh Hours Before Trump Arrived," *NBC News*, May 22, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/houthi-rebels-fired-missile-riyadh-hours-trump-arrived-n763156.
49 "Letter dated 26 January 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council resolution 2342 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council," p. 28, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1639536?ln=en&v=pdf.
50 "Yemen Rebel Chief Vows to 'Never Surrender'," *The Times of Israel*, November 7, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/yemen-rebel-chief-vows-to-never-surrender/.
51 Maha El Dahan, "Yemen's Houthis Enter Mideast Fray, Hardening Spillover Fears," Reuters, October 31, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthis-enter-mideast-fray-hardening-spillover-fears-2023-10-31/.

52 Michael Knights, "Assessing the Houthi War Effort Since October 2023," *CTC Sentinel* 17, no. 4 (April 2024), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/assessing-the-houthi-war-effort-since-october-2023/; "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
53 "Seized Galaxy Leader Ship in Yemen's Hodeidah Port Area -Owner," Reuters, November 21, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/seized-galaxy-leader-ship-yemens-hodeidah-port-area-owner-2023-11-20/.
54 Mohammed Alghobari, "Yemen's Houthis Warn They Will Target All Ships Headed to Israel," Reuters, December 9, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthis-say-they-will-target-ships-red-sea-en-route-israel-2023-12-09/.
55 "Houthis Vow to Keep Attacking Ships in Red Sea After U.S., U.K. Strikes Target Their Weapons in Yemen," *CBS News*, January 12, 2024, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-uk-strike-yemen-to-retaliate-houthi-attacks/; United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen, S/2025/650, Annex 26, p. 81, citing Mohammed Ali al-Houthi's December 24, 2024, post on X, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/650.
56 "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
57 Michael Knights, "A Draw Is a Win: The Houthis After One Year of War," *CTC Sentinel* 17, no. 9 (October 2024), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/a-draw-is-a-win-the-houthis-after-one-year-of-war/.
58 Steve Holland, Jarrett Renshaw, Jaidaa Taha, and Menna Alaaeldin, "Trump Announces Deal to Stop Bombing Houthis, End Shipping Attacks," Reuters, May 6, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/trump-says-us-will-stop-bombing-houthis-after-agreement-struck-2025-05-06/.
59 David Gritten, "Search for Survivors After Houthis Sink Second Red Sea Cargo Ship in a Week," *BBC*, July 10, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3071vp2d8yo; Claire Parker and Heba Farouk Mahfouz, "How Egypt Is Reviving the Suez Canal After Maritime Attacks Sank Traffic," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/01/21/suez-canal-shipping-houthis-attacks/.
60 "Yemen's Houthi Rebels Signal That They've Stopped Attacks on Israel and Red Sea Shipping," *NBC News*, November 11, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthi-rebels-signal-stopped-attacks-israel-red-sea-shipping-rcna243165.
61 "Houthi Leader Warns Future Rounds of Conflict with Israel Are 'Certain'," *The Times of Israel*, December 26, 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/houthi-leader-warns-future-rounds-of-conflict-with-israel-are-certain/.
62 Andrew Barnett, Daniel Kiss, and Benoit Faucon, "See How the Houthi Advance Was Powered by Arms From Iran and China," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/see-how-the-houthi-advance-was-powered-by-arms-from-iran-and-china-3637f097.
63 "Iran Enabling Houthi Attacks Across the Middle East," Defense Intelligence Agency, February 2024, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Documents/News/Military_Power_Publications/Iran_Houthi_Final2.pdf.
64 Nicholas Kulish, "Yemen's Houthi Militants Are Learning to Arm Themselves," *The New York Times*, September 15, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/15/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-weapons.html; Michael Horton, "Looking West: The Houthis' Expanding Footprint in the Horn of Africa," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2024, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/looking-west-the-houthis-expanding-footprint-in-the-horn-of-africa/; Howard Altman, "Houthi Weapons Arsenal Remains A Mystery To The U.S.," *The War Zone*, March 6, 2025, https://www.twz.com/news-features/houthi-weapons-arsenal-remains-a-mystery-to-the-u-s; Barnett, Kiss, and Faucon, "See How the Houthi Advance Was Powered by Arms From Iran and China."
65 Carole Landry, "Iran Arming Yemen's Houthi Rebels Since 2009: UN Report," *Middle East Eye*, May 1, 2015, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-arming-yemens-houthi-rebels-2009-un-report; "Iran Enabling Houthi Attacks," Defense Intelligence Agency.
66 Benoit Faucon and Dion Nissenbaum, "Iran Navy Port Emerges as Key to Alleged Weapons Smuggling to Yemen, U.N. Report Says," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-navy-port-emerges-as-key-to-alleged-weapons-smuggling-to-yemen-u-n-report-says-11641651941.
67 "Iranian Arms Shipment Routes to Houthis Revealed by Large Seizure," *Maritime Executive*, August 11, 2025, https://maritime-executive.com/article/iranian-arms-shipment-routes-to-houthis-revealed-by-large-seizure.
68 Faucon and Nissenbaum, "Iran Navy Port Emerges as Key to Alleged Weapons Smuggling to Yemen."
69 Benoit Faucon, "Yemen's Houthis, Threatening Global Oil, Are Increasingly Supplied by China," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 23, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthis-threatening-global-oil-are-increasingly-supplied-by-china-6bfcfeec?mod=article_inline.

70 Ismaeel Naar, "Houthis in Yemen Declare Red Sea Blockade on Saudi Arabia," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/20/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-saudi-arabia-red-sea-blockade.html; "Iran's Misuse of Civilian Aircraft," United Against Nuclear Iran, n.d., https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/irans-misuse-of-civilian-aircraft; "Iran Flew IRGC Commanders, Missile Gear to Yemen's Houthis," *Arab News*, July 23, 2026, https://www.arabnews.com/middle-east/iran-flew-irgc-commanders-missile-gear-to-yemens-houthis-2652070.
71 Yara Bayoumy and Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: Iran Steps up Weapons Supply to Yemen's Houthis via Oman – Officials," Reuters, October 20, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/business/autos-transportation/iran-steps-up-weapons-supply-to-yemens-houthis-via-oman-officials-idUSL8N1CO6S1/.
72 Laurence Norman and Benoit Faucon, "The Houthis Are Building an Advanced Missile with Chinese Parts," *The Wall Street Journal,* October 13, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/houthi-missile-china-parts-5c2b2516.
73 Farnaz Fassihi, Eric Schmitt, and Ronen Bergman, "Israel-Iran Sea Skirmishes Escalate as Mine Damages Iranian Military Ship," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/world/middleeast/israel-iran-ship-mine-attack.html.
74 Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, "Targeting Iranian Spy Ships," *Articles of War*, March 24, 2025, https://lieber.westpoint.edu/targeting-iranian-spy-ships/.
75 Courtney Kube and Carol E. Lee, "U.S. Conducted Cyberattack on Suspected Iranian Spy Ship," *NBC News*, February 15, 2024, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/us-conducted-cyberattack-suspected-iranian-spy-ship-rcna138638.
76 Samia Nakhoul and Parisa Hafezi, "Iranian and Hezbollah Commanders Help Direct Houthi Attacks in Yemen," Reuters, January 20, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iranian-hezbollah-commanders-help-direct-houthi-attacks-yemen-sources-say-2024-01-20/.
77 Knights, al-Gabarni, and Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council."
78 Samy Magdy, "A Blocked Iranian Flight to Yemen Set off Houthis' Latest Spiral with Saudi Arabia," *AP News*, August 10, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/yemen-houthis-saudi-arabia-red-sea-iran-a8a0e282a17c13a1e528e7ca73f17c5e; Samy Magdy, "Iranian Advisers Helped Houthis Seize Yemen's Red Sea Coast in Less than 48 Hours, Sources Tell AP," *AP News*, September 23, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/yemen-houthis-iran-war-red-sea-battle-e32ed78eb9b528642d043d4303192927; Summer Said, Saleh al-Batati, and Benoit Faucon, "Iran Is Giving Houthis Targeting and Intelligence for Attacks on Saudi Arabia," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 16, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-houthi-saudi-arabia-attacks-38b82107.
79 Dan Roberts and Kareem Shaheen, "Saudi Arabia Launches Yemen Air Strikes as Alliance Builds Against Houthi Rebels," *The Guardian,* March 26, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/26/saudi-arabia-begins-airstrikes-against-houthi-in-yemen; Ahmed Al-Haj, "Saudi-Led Forces Strike Yemen Rebels, Blockade Ports," *Military Times,* March 30, 2015, https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2015/03/30/saudi-led-forces-strike-yemen-rebels-blockade-ports/.
80 "The Houthis," United Nations Security Council, February 28, 2022, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/houthis-0.
81 "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
82 "U.S. to End Bombings of Houthi Militants in Yemen, Trump Says," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/05/06/trump-houthis-bombing-yemen/; Courtney Kube, "Trump Operation Against Houthis Cost More Than $1 Billion," *NBC News*, May 8, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-operation-houthis-cost-1-billion-rcna205333; "Oman Says It Mediated a Ceasefire Between U.S., Yemen's Houthis," *NBC News*, May 6, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/yemen/oman-says-mediated-ceasefire-us-yemens-houthis-rcna205175.
83 "2025-012-Red Sea, Bab el Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Somali Basin-Houthi Attacks on Commercial Vessels," U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, https://www.maritime.dot.gov/msci/2025-012-red-sea-bab-el-mandeb-strait-gulf-aden-arabian-sea-persian-gulf-and-somali-basin.
84 Isabel Kershner and Ismaeel Naar, "Israel Bombs Yemeni Airport and Ports After Houthi Missile Launches," *The New York Times,* December 26, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/26/world/middleeast/israel-yemen-bombs-houthis.html.

85 Jon Gambrell, "Chief of Staff of Yemen Houthi Rebel's Military Dies from Wounds Suffered in Israeli Airstrike," *AP News*, October 16, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/yemen-houtis-military-chief-killed-29a7709bdbcc2e51e623084de80e8e8a.
86 "Israeli Airstrike Kills Houthi Prime Minister," *NBC News*, August 30, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/yemen/israeli-airstrike-kills-houthi-prime-minister-rcna228187.
87 "Yemen's Houthi Rebels Signal That They've Stopped Attacks," *NBC News*.
88 "Djibouti Code of Conduct," International Maritime Organization, https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/security/pages/dcoc.aspx; "Combined Task Forces," Combined Maritime Forces, https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/combined-task-forces/; "Saudi Arabia Unveils Plans for Multinational Maritime Defence Coalition," Reuters, July 30, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-unveils-plans-multinational-maritime-defence-coalition-2026-07-30/.
89 Samy Magdy and Hamza Fahmy, "Yemen's Factions Battling Iran-Backed Houthis Share a Common Enemy but Not Common Goals," *AP News*, September 23, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/yemen-houthi-rebels-war-saudi-uae-explainer-0a61dfa9402847c70076d998ef3c3983.
90 Menna Alaaeldin, Nayera Abdallah, and Maha El Dahan, "UAE to Pull Remaining Forces from Yemen in Crisis with Saudi Arabia," Reuters, December 30, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-led-coalition-yemen-calls-civilians-mukalla-port-evacuate-saudi-state-news-2025-12-30/; "Yemen's Internationally Recognized Government Announces Retaking of Hadramout," *Al Arabiya English*, January 4, 2026, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2026/01/04/yemen-s-homeland-shield-forces-enter-mukalla.
91 Magdy and Fahmy, "Yemen's Factions Battling Iran-Backed Houthis Share a Common Enemy."
92 Fatma Khaled, "Separatist Group in Southern Yemen Announces Dissolution After Its Leader Flees to the UAE," Associated Press, January 9, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/yemen-war-saudi-arabia-uae-southern-transitional-council-7303d1d01a49f959bfb9baeeb5ff400d.
93 Naar, "Houthis in Yemen Declare Red Sea Blockade"; Frederico Maccioni, Timour Azhari, and Eman Abouhassira, "Houthis Fire on Saudi Red Sea Oil Sites," Reuters, July 24, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-strikes-target-yemens-hodeidah-says-houthi-run-al-masirah-tv-2026-07-24/.
94 Pranav Baskar, "Houthis Claim Strikes on 2 Saudi Oil Tankers in Red Sea," *The New York Times*, July 22, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/22/world/middleeast/houthis-saudi-oil-tankers-red-sea.html; Ismaeel Naar, "Houthis Claim Strike on Saudi Vessel as Red Sea Violence Escalates," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/17/world/middleeast/houthis-saudi-strike.html.
95 "Saudi Airstrike Kills 3 in Yemen, Houthi Official Says," *PBS News*, September 15, 2026, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/saudi-airstrikes-kill-3-in-yemen-houthi-official-says.
96 "Iran-Backed Houthis Attack Saudi Cities and Energy Facilities, Wounding at Least 73," *Iran International*, September 8, 2026, https://www.iranintl.com/en/202609083749.
97 "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
98 Mohammed Ghobari, Eman Abouhassira, and Yasmin Ghania, "Saudis Shut Down Oil Pipelines as Houthis Tighten Grip on Red Sea Shipping," Reuters, September 11, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/saudis-shut-down-oil-pipeline-houthis-tighten-grip-red-sea-shipping-2026-09-12/; "Why Advanced U.S. Weapons Aren't Stopping Houthi Attacks in Saudi Arabia," *NBC News*, October 13, 2026, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-struggle-defend-houthis-attacks-rcna603219.
99 Niccolo Conte, "Ranked: The World's Largest Oil Exporters in 2025," *Visual Capitalist*, September 24, 2026, https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-worlds-largest-oil-exporters-2025/.
100 Fanny Arlandis et Elise Vincent, "L'envoi de « moyens militaires » français en Arabie saoudite sort de l'ombre la discrète coopération de défense entre Paris et Riyad," *Le Monde*, September 26, 2026, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2026/09/26/l-envoi-de-moyens-militaires-francais-en-arabie-saoudite-sort-de-l-ombre-la-discrete-cooperation-de-defense-entre-paris-et-riyad_6783006_3210.html; Chris Mason, Frank Gardner, Isabella Allen, and Richard Wheeler, "UK to Help Refueling Saudi Jets Countering Houthi Attacks," *BBC*, September 22, 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqlykpe4dk0yo.
101 Parisa Hafezi, Samia Nakhoul, and Jonathan Saul, "Iran Tells Houthis to Close Red Sea Gateway If US Hits Power Network, Sources Say," Reuters, July 16, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-tells-houthis-close-red-sea-gateway-if-us-hits-power-network-sources-say-2026-07-16/.

102 Parisa Hafezi, Mohammed Ghobari, and Timour Azhari, "Iranian Arms and Advice Helped Yemen's Houthis Seize Key Red Sea City, Sources Say," Reuters, September 10, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iranian-arms-advice-helped-yemens-houthis-seize-key-red-sea-city-sources-say-2026-09-10/.
103 Euan Ward, "Days of Deadly Houthi Attacks Show Saudi Arabia's Vulnerabilities," *The New York Times*, October 9, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/09/world/middleeast/yemen-houthi-attack-saudi-arabia-airport-riyadh.html.
104 "At Least 12 Killed, More Than 300 Hurt in Houthi Attack on Riyadh Airport," *The Times of Israel*, October 10, 2026, https://www.timesofisrael.com/dozens-hurt-as-houthis-hit-riyadh-airport-trump-us-may-join-saudi-strikes/.
105 "IATA Highlights Value of Aviation for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," IATA, May 6, 2025, https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2025-releases/2025-05-06-01/; "Yemen's Houthis Say They Attacked Aramco Facility in Riyadh with Missiles, Drones," *NBC News*, October 4, 2026, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/middle-east/fire-smoke-seen-aramco-facility-riyadh-rcna601278.
106 "At Least 12 Killed, More than 300 Hurt in Houthi Attack on Riyadh Airport," *The Times of Israel*; Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social, October 13, 2026, https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/117434446535757477.
107 Patrick Wintour, "Iran's Houthi Allies Capture Strategic Island on Vital Oil Shipping Route," *The Guardian*, September 12, 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/sep/11/iran-houthi-allies-capture-strategic-island-bab-al-mandab-strait.
108 "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
109 "Houthis Step up Battle to Seize Major City of Taiz from Yemen's Saudi-Backed Government Forces," *CBS News*, October 12, 2026, https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/iran-war-us-trump-saudi-arabia-houthi/#post-update-a24a4be8.
110 United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen, S/2024/731, October 11, 2024, p. 11, https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/259/53/pdf/n2425953.pdf.
111 Chas Newkey-Burden, "The 'Southern Giants' Militia Reshaping the Conflict in Yemen," *The Week*, October 14, 2026, https://theweek.com/world-news/the-southern-giants-militia-reshaping-the-conflict-in-yemen; "Nation's Shield Forces: New Player in Dynamic Theatre," Abaad Studies and Research Center, June 2, 2024, https://abaadstudies.org/en/policy-analysis/topic/60114; "The Yemeni Emergency Forces, the Contexts of Their Origin and Command Structure, Their Capabilities and the Nature of Their Organization," *Defenseliney*, December 28, 2025, https://defenseliney.com/posts/365.
112 Nadwa al-Dawsari, "From Coalition to Confrontation: Saudi-UAE Rivalry in Yemen and Its Regional Implications," Middle East Institute, January 5, 2026, https://mei.edu/publication/from-coalition-to-confrontation-saudi-uae-rivalry-in-yemen-and-its-regional-implications/; "Nation's Shield Forces," Abaad Studies and Research Center.
113 "Yemen: Who Are the UAE-Backed Giants Brigades?," *Middle East Eye*, January 12, 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemen-giants-brigades-uae-backed-who.
114 Newkey-Burden, "The 'Southern Giants' Militia Reshaping the Conflict in Yemen"; "State of the War," *The Yemen Review*, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 15, 2022, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/jan-feb-2022/17005.
115 Joseph Krauss, "Why Yemen's Houthis Have Only Grown Stronger Through Years of War," Associated Press, September 16, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/iran-us-war-yemen-houthis-military-capabilities-4ca491bf0073cc073e04b787ac835807; Charles Caris, "Yemen Order of Battle," Critical Threats, February 23, 2015, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/yemen-order-of-battle.
116 "Expanding Al Shabaab–Houthi Ties Escalate Security Threats to Red Sea Region," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, May 28, 2025, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/al-shabaab-houthi-security-red-sea/.
117 Bureau of Counterterrorism, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," U.S. Department of State, n.d., https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations; Office of Public Affairs, "Kenyan National Indicted for Conspiring to Hijack Aircraft on Behalf of the Al Qaeda-Affiliated Terrorist Organization Al Shabaab," U.S. Department of Justice, December 16, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/kenyan-national-indicted-conspiring-hijack-aircraft-behalf-al-qaeda-affiliated-terrorist.
118 "Houthi Leverage over the Red Sea Escalates Threats for Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, September 22, 2026, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2026-houthi-red-sea-threats/.

119 Peter Salisbury, Nadwa al-Dawsari, and Jay Bahadur, *From Spoke to Hub: The Houthis in Africa*, Century Foundation, August 24, 2026, https://tcf.org/content/report/from-spoke-to-hub-the-houthis-in-africa/.
120 Salisbury, al-Dawsari, and Bahadur, *From Spoke to Hub.*
121 "Mapping Gulf State Actors' Expanding Engagements in East Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 8, 2025, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/gulf-state-actors-east-africa/#1750275978172-7a554010-d017.
122 Noé Hochet-Bodin, Liselotte Mas, and Francesca Fattori, "Au Somaliland, la discrète implantation d'une base militaire construite par les Emirats pour les Etats-Unis et Israël," *Le Monde*, April 6, 2026, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2026/04/06/au-somaliland-la-discrete-implantation-d-une-base-militaire-construite-par-les-emirats-pour-les-etats-unis-et-israel_6677457_3212.html.
123 Simon Marks, "Israel Plans New Foothold on the Red Sea to Fight the Houthis," *Bloomberg*, March 11, 2026, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-03-11/israel-eyes-red-sea-base-in-somaliland-to-fight-iran-backed-houthis.
124 "Mapping Gulf State Actors' Expanding Engagements in East Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies.
125 Marks, "Israel Plans New Foothold on the Red Sea to Fight the Houthis."
126 "Saudi Arabia Unveils Plans for Multinational Maritime Defence Coalition," Reuters.
127 Ward, "Days of Deadly Houthi Attacks Show Saudi Arabia's Vulnerabilities."
128 "Iran Projectile Tracker," JINSA, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.
129 "Houthis Face Being Cut Off on Yemeni Coast," *The Maritime Executive*, October 5, 2026, https://maritime-executive.com/article/houthis-face-being-cut-off-on-yemeni-coast.
130 "March 15 Red Sea Update," U.S. Central Command, March 15, 2024, https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/3709032/march-15-red-sea-update/.
131 "2025-012-Red Sea, Bab el Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Somali Basin-Houthi Attacks on Commercial Vessels," U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, https://www.maritime.dot.gov/msci/2025-012-red-sea-bab-el-mandeb-strait-gulf-aden-arabian-sea-persian-gulf-and-somali-basin; "Houthi Rebels Take over Yemen's Hodeidah Port: Residents," Reuters, October 15, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us/houthi-rebels-take-over-yemens-hodeidah-port-residents-idUSKCN0I40HA/.
132 Salisbury, al-Dawsari, and Bahadur, *From Spoke to Hub.*
133 "CENTCOM Says More than 50,000 US Troops Now in Region," *Middle East Eye*, March 25, 2026, https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/centcom-says-more-50000-us-troops-now-region; Caitlyn Burchett, "USS Theodore Roosevelt Deploys From San Diego, USS Abraham Lincoln Near Hawaii," *USNI News*, September 28, 2026, https://news.usni.org/2026/09/28/uss-theodore-roosevelt-deploys-from-san-diego-uss-abraham-lincoln-near-hawaii.
134 Nabeel A. Khoury, "Yemen's Houthi Movement Reconsidered," Arab Center, June 12, 2025, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/yemens-houthi-movement-reconsidered/.
135 Saeed Al Batati, "Yemen's Teachers Pushed to the Brink as Salaries Collapse," *Al Jazeera*, April 8, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/4/8/yemens-teachers-pushed-to-the-brink-as-salaries-collapse; Fatima Abo Alasrar, "The Houthis' Embargo on Yemen's Oil Exports," Middle East Institute, December 9, 2022, https://mei.edu/publication/houthis-embargo-yemens-oil-exports/.
136 "Iran Warns It Could Open up 'New Fronts' in War After US Threatens 'Large-Scale Assault'," *France24*, May 19, 2026, https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20260519-iran-warns-it-could-open-up-new-fronts-in-war-after-us-threatens-large-scale-assault.
137 John Hannah and Ari Cicurel, *Forged Under Fire: Middle East Air Defense After Iran's 2024 Attacks on Israel*, JINSA, June 2025, p. 14, https://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IAMD-Report-6.pdf.
138 "UAE Vice President Visits Saudi Arabia in First Visit Since Rift," Reuters, September 29, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uae-vice-president-visits-saudi-arabia-first-visit-since-rift-2026-09-29/.
139 Pamela Quanrud, "The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS: A Success Story," *Foreign Service Journal*, January–February 2018, https://afsa.org/global-coalition-defeat-isis-success-story.
140 Hannah and Cicurel, *Forged Under Fire,* pp. 11-14.
141 "THAAD, in First Operational Use, Destroys Midrange Ballistic Missile in Houthi Attack," *Military Times*, January 21, 2022, https://www.militarytimes.com/news/2022/01/21/thaad-in-first-operational-use-destroys-midrange-ballistic-missile-in-houthi-attack/.

142 "Why Can't Saudi Arabia Stop Houthi Missiles—and Could Israel Help?" *The Media Line*, October 2026, https://themedialine.org/top-stories/why-cant-saudi-arabia-stop-houthi-missiles-and-could-israel-help/.
143 "Biden Admin Approves Potential Multibillion-Dollar Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE," *CNN*, August 2, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/02/politics/us-saudi-uae-proposed-arms-deal/index.html.
144 "Oman Says It Mediated Ceasefire Between US, Yemen's Houthis," Reuters, May 6, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/oman-says-it-has-mediated-ceasefire-deal-between-yemens-houthis-us-2025-05-06/; Bayoumy and Stewart, "Exclusive: Iran Steps up Weapons Supply to Yemen's Houthis via Oman."
145 Ikrame Imane Kouachi, "Egypt Says Suez Canal Revenue Down by $6 Billion over Regional Tensions," Anadolu Agency, September 29, 2024, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/egypt-says-suez-canal-revenue-down-by-6-billion-over-regional-tensions/3345272.
146 See, for example, U.S. Pacific Command (@USPACOM), X, June 5, 2026, https://x.com/USPACOM/status/2062856321071001665?a=H9HqbGacmOw18zGZ8mc&s=20.
147 "Fact Sheet: Combating the Financing of Terrorism, Disrupting Terrorism at Its Core," U.S. Department of the Treasury, September 8, 2011, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/tg1291; Dennis M. Lormel, "Combating Terrorist Financing at the Agency and Interagency Levels," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 4 (March 2008), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/combating-terrorist-financing-at-the-agency-and-interagency-levels/.
148 Daljir Media (@radiodaljir), X, January 11, 2024, https://x.com/radiodaljir/status/1745312789869011397?s=20.
149 Victoria Amani Mwaniki Kishoiyian, "U.S. Strengthens Military Presence in Breakaway Puntland amid Battle for Red Sea," *Middle East Eye*, August 12, 2026, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-strengthens-military-presence-breakaway-puntland-amid-battle-red-sea; Paul Tilsley, "Could Somaliland Base Emerge as US Foothold Against Iran, Houthis in Key Sea Lanes?" *Fox News*, April 13, 2026, https://www.foxnews.com/world/could-somaliland-base-emerge-us-foothold-against-iran-houthis-key-sea-lanes.
150 See Augusto Lopez-Claros and Ian J. Lynch, "Combatting Corruption to Advance Good Governance," in *Global Governance and International Cooperation*, ed. Richard Falk and Augusto Lopez-Claro (London: Routledge, 2021), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032699028.


JINSA
50TH
ANNIVERSARY